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A YOUNG HERO



Edward S. Ellis

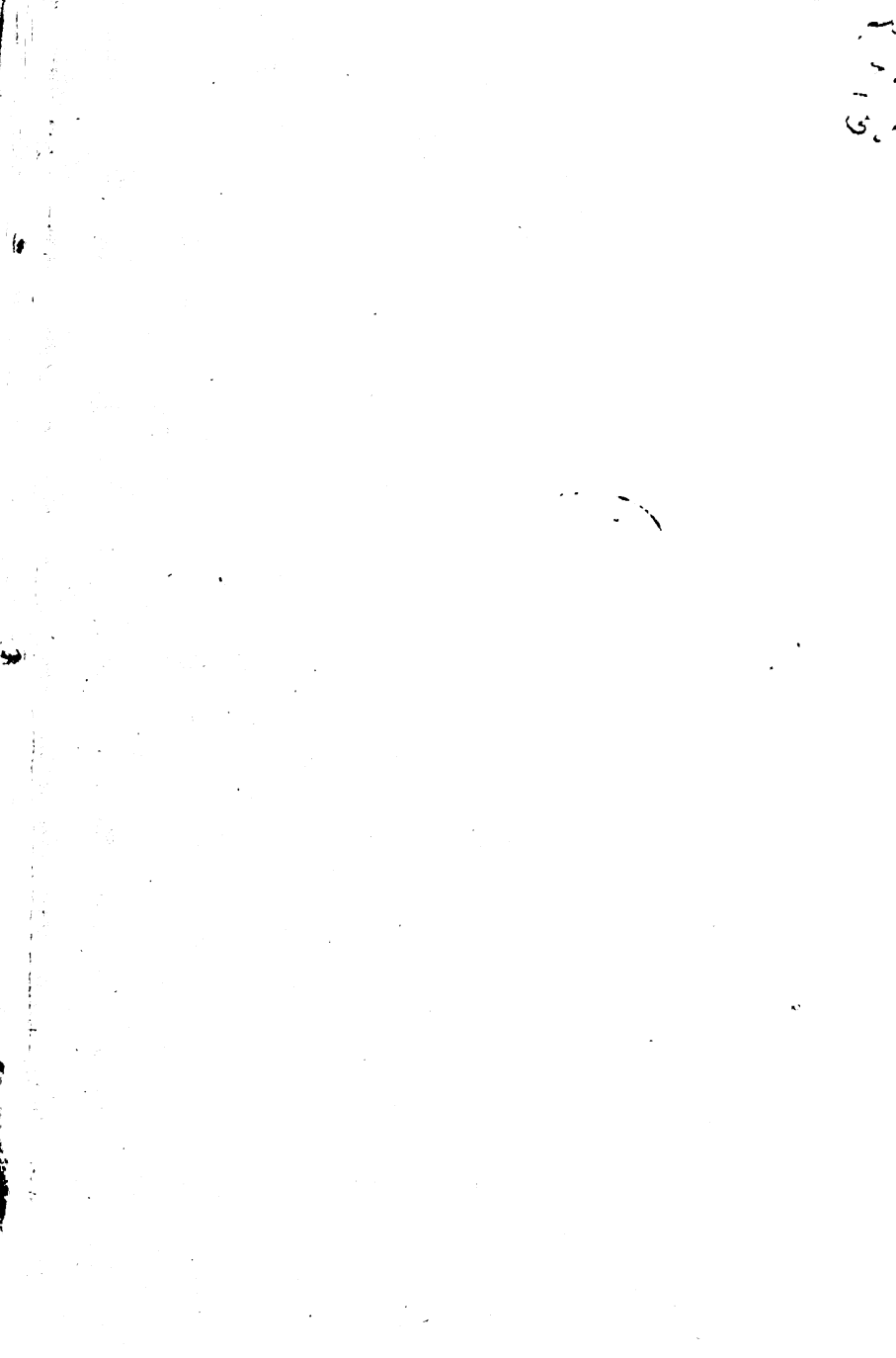
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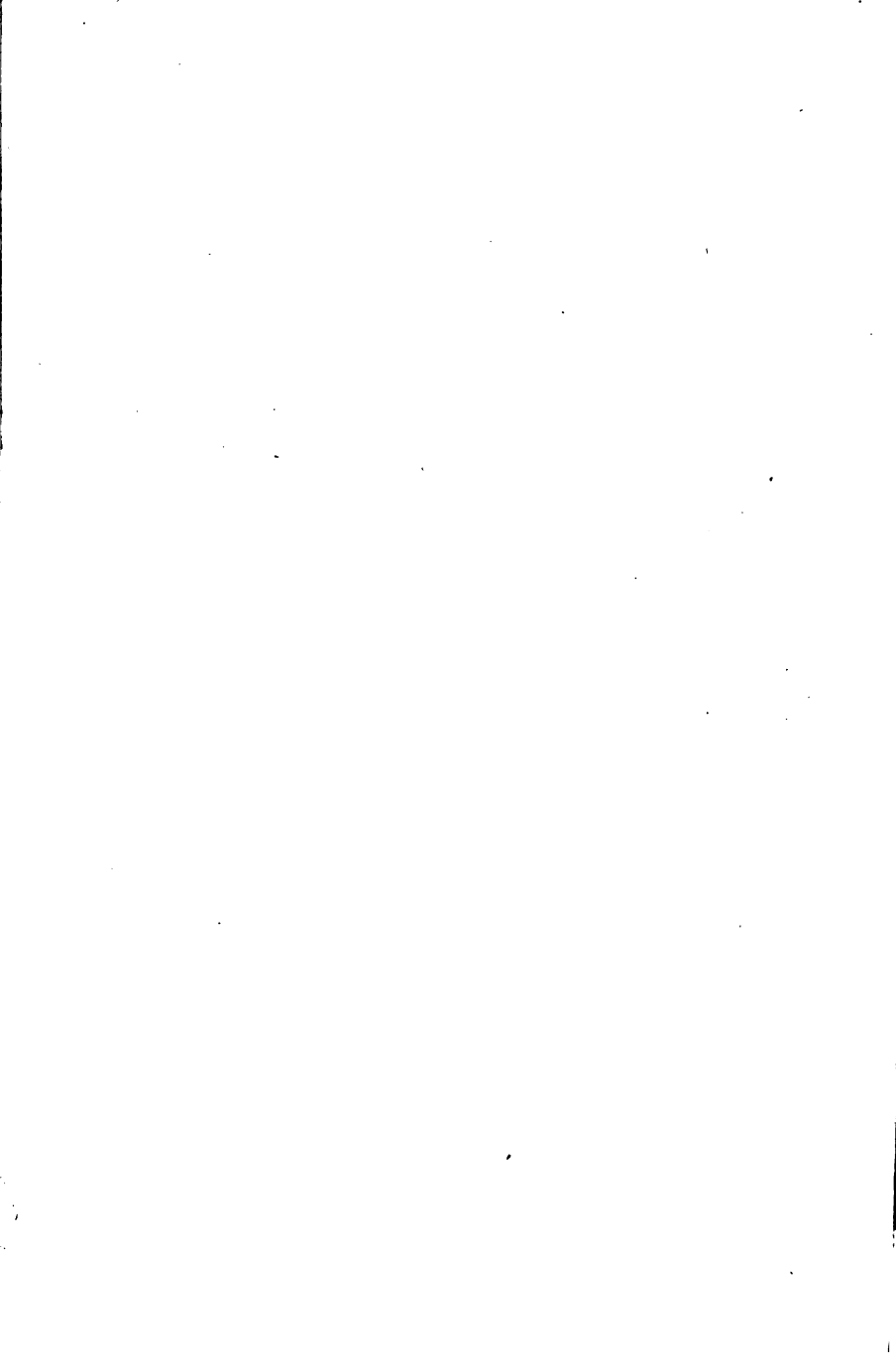
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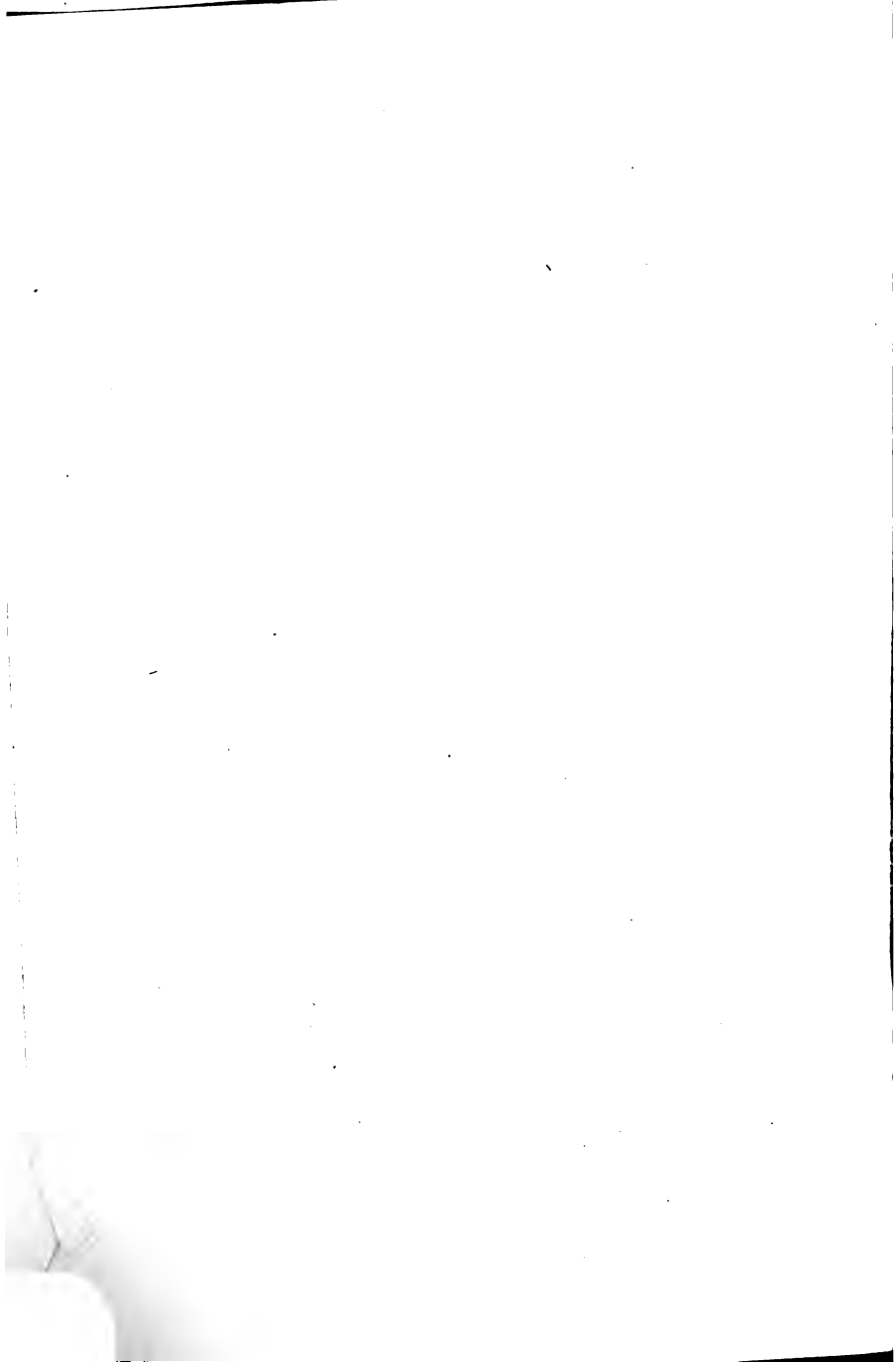
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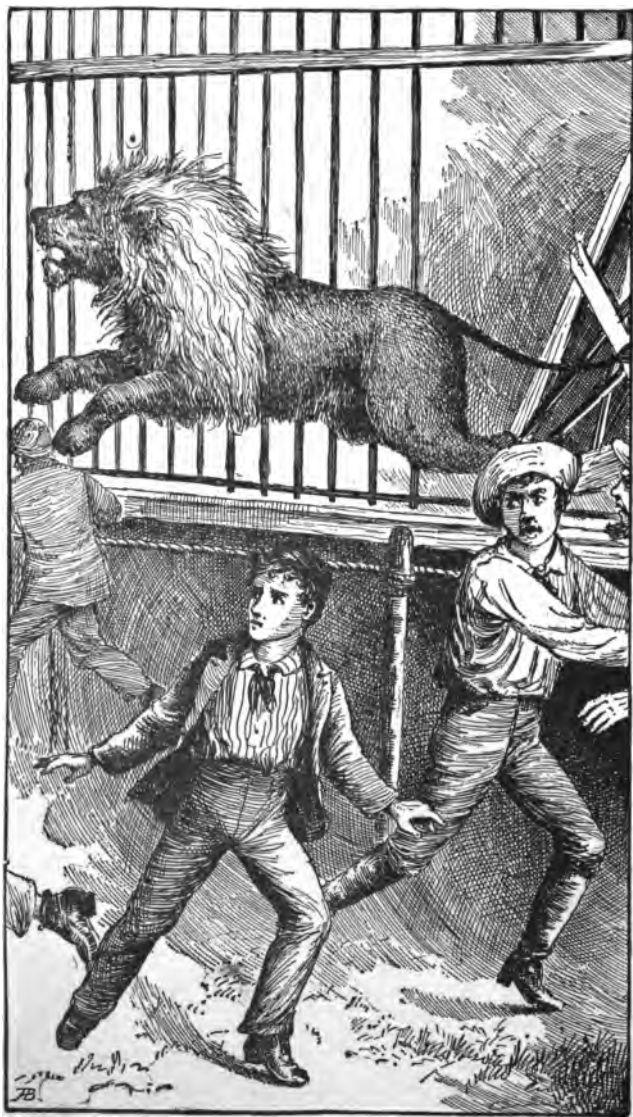






Robert B. Hammond
Christmas
1896

From Mama --



**"The lion sprang through the air among the terrified group."
—(See page 71.)**

A YOUNG HERO; OR, FIGHTING TO WIN.

By EDWARD S. ELLIS,

Author of

"Adrift in the Wjlds," etc., etc.

ILLUSTRATED.



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A YOUNG HERO.

CHAPTER I.

THE PEACEMAKER.

A FIGHT! A fight! Form a ring!" A dozen or more excited boys shouted these words, and, rushing forward, hastily formed a ring around two play-mates who stood in the middle of the road, their hats off, eyes glaring, fists clenched, while they panted with anger, and were on the point of flying at one another with the fury of young wildcats.

They had been striking, kicking and biting a minute before over some trifling dispute, and they had now stopped to take breath and gather strength before attacking each other again with a fierceness which had become all the greater from the brief rest.

"Give it to him, Sam! Black his eyes for him! Hit him under the ear! Bloody his nose!"

Thus shouted the partisans of Sammy McClay, who had thrown down his school books, and pitched into his opponent, as though he meant to leave nothing of him.

The friends of Joe Hunt were just as loud and urgent.

"Sail in, Joe! You can whip him before he knows it! Kick him! Don't be a coward! You've got him!"

A party of boys and girls were on their way home from the Tottenville public school, laughing, romping and frolicking with each other, when, all at once, like a couple of bantam chickens, these two youngsters began fighting.

The girls looked on in a horrified way, whispering to each other, and declaring that they meant to tell Mr. McCurtis, the teacher, including also the respective mothers of the young pugilists.

The other boys, as is nearly always the case, did their utmost to urge on the fight, and, closing about Sam and Joe, taunted them in loud voices, and appealed to them to resume hostilities at once.

The fighters seemed to be equally matched, and, as they panted and glared, each waited for the other to renew the struggle by striking the first blow.

"You just hit me if you dare! that's all I want!" exclaimed Sammy McClay, shaking his head so vigorously that he almost bumped his nose against that of Joe Hunt, who was just as ferocious, as he called back:

"You touch me, Sam McClay, just touch me! I dare you! double, double dare you."

Matters were fast coming to the exploding point, but not fast enough to suit the audience. Jimmy Emery picked up a chip, and running forward, balanced it in a delicate position on the shoulder of Sam McClay, and, addressing his opponent said: "Knock that off, Joe!"

"Yes, knock it off!" shouted Sam, "I dare you to knock it off!"

"Who's afraid?" demanded Joe, looking at the chip,

with an expression which showed he meant to flip it to the ground.

“Well, you just try it—that’s all!”

Joe was in the very act of upsetting the bit of wood, when a boy about their own age, with a flapping straw hat, and with his trousers rolled far above his knees, ran in between the two, and used his arms with so much vigor that the contestants were thrown quite a distance apart.

“What’s the matter with you fellows?” demanded this boy, glancing from one to the other. “What do you want to make fools of yourselves for?”

“He run agin me,” said Sammy McClay, “and knocked me over Jim Emery.”

“Well, what of it?” asked the peacemaker. “Will it make you feel any better to get your head cracked? What’s the matter of *you*, Joe Hunt?” he added, turning his glance without changing his position, toward the other pugilist.

“What did he punch me for, when I stubbed my toe and run agin him?” and Joe showed a disposition just then to move around his questioner, so as to get at the offender.

The other boys did not like this interference with their enjoyment, and called on the peacemaker to let them have it out; but he stood his ground, and shaking his right fist at Sammy McClay, and his left at Joe Hunt, he told them they must let each other alone, or he would whip them both.

This created some laughter, for the lad was no older

than they, and hardly as tall as either; but there is a great deal in the manner of a man or boy. If his flashing eye, his stern voice, and look of determination show that he means what he says, or is in dead earnest, his opponent generally yields.

At the critical juncture, the girls added their voices in favor of peace, and their champion, stooping down, picked up the hats from the ground, and jammed them upon their owners' heads with a force that nearly threw them off their feet.

“That’s enough! now come on!”

Sam and Joe walked along, rather sullenly at first. They glowered on each other, shook their heads, muttered and seemed on the point of renewing the contest more than once; but the passions of childhood are brief, and the storm soon blew over. Before the boys and girls had reached the cross-roads, Sam McClay and Joe Hunt were playing with each other like the best of friends, as indeed they were.

The name of the lad who had stopped the fight was Fred Sheldon, and he is the hero of this story.

CHAPTER II.

THE CALL TO SCHOOL.

FRED SHELDON, as I have said, is the hero of this story.

He was twelve years of age, the picture of rosy health, good nature, bounding spirits and mental strength. He was bright and well advanced in his studies, and as is generally the case with such vigorous youngsters he was fond of fun, which too often, perhaps, passed the line of propriety and became mischief.

On the Monday morning after the fight, which Fred Sheldon interrupted, some ten or twelve boys stopped on their way to the Tottenville Public School to admire in open-mouthed wonder, the gorgeous pictures pasted on a huge framework of boards, put up for the sole purpose of making such a display.

These flaming posters were devoted to setting forth the unparalleled attractions of Bandman's great menagerie and circus, which was announced to appear in the well-known "Hart's Half-Acre," near the village of Tottenville.

These scenes, in which elephants, tigers, leopards, camels, sacred cows, and indeed an almost endless array of animals were shown on a scale that indicated they were as high as a meeting-house, in which the serpents,

it unwound from the trees where they were crushing men and beasts to death, would have stretched across "Hart's Half-Acre" (which really contained several acres), those frightful encounters, in which a man, single-handed, was seen to be spreading death and destruction with a clubbed gun among the fierce denizens of the forest; all these had been displayed on the side of barns and covered bridges, at the cross-roads, and indeed in every possible available space for the past three weeks; and, as the date of the great show was the one succeeding that of which we are speaking, it can be understood that the little village of Tottenville and the surrounding country were in a state of excitement such as had not been known since the advent of the preceding circus.

Regularly every day the school children had stopped in front of the huge bill-board and studied and admired and talked over the great show, while those who expected to go in the afternoon or evening looked down in pity on their less fortunate playmates.

The interest seemed to intensify as the day approached, and, now that it was so close at hand, the little group found it hard to tear themselves away from the fascinating scenes before them.

Down in one corner of the board was the picture of a hyena desecrating a cemetery, as it is well known those animals are fond of doing. This bad creature, naturally enough, became very distasteful to the boys, who showed their ill-will in many ways.

Several almost ruined their new shoes by kicking him, while others had pelted him with stones, and still others,

in face of the warning printed in big letters, had haggled him dreadfully with their jack-knives.

It was a warm summer morning and most of the boys not only were bare-footed, but had their trousers rolled above their knees, and, generally, were without coat or vest.

"To-morrow afternoon the show will be here," said Sammy McClay, smacking his lips and shaking his head as though he tasted a luscious morsel, "and I'm going."

"How are you going," asked Joe Hunt, sarcastically, "when your father said he wouldn't give you the money?"

"Never you mind," was the answer, with another significant shake of the head. "I'm goin'—that's all."

"Goin' to try and crawl under the tent. I know. But you can't do it. You'll get a whack from the whip of the man that's watching that you'll feel for six weeks. Don't I know—'cause, didn't I try it?"

"I wouldn't be such a dunce as you; you got half way under the tent and then stuck fast, so you couldn't go backward or forward, and you begun to yell so you like to broke up the performance, and when the man come along why he had the best chance in the world to cowhide you, and he did it. I think I know a little better than that."

At this moment, Mr. Abijah McCurtis, the school teacher in the little stone school-house a hundred yards away, solemnly lifted his spectacles from his nose to his forehead, and grasping the handle of his large cracked bell walked to the door and swayed it vigorously for a minute or so.

This was the regular summons for the boys and girls to enter school, and he had sent forth the unmusical clangor, summer and winter, for a full two-score years.

Having called the pupils together, the pedagogue sat down, drew his spectacles back astride of his nose, and resumed setting copies in the books which had been laid on his desk the day before.

In a minute or so the boys and girls came straggling in, but the experienced eye of the teacher saw that several were missing.

Looking through the open door he discovered where the four delinquent urchins were; they were still standing in front of the great showy placards, studying the enchanting pictures, as they had done so many times before.

They were all talking earnestly, Sammy McClay, Joe Hunt, Jimmy Emery and Fred Sheldon, and they had failed for the first time in their lives to hear the cracked bell.

Most teachers, we are bound to believe, would have called the boys a second time or sent another lad to notify them, but the present chance was one of those which, unfortunately, the old-time pedagogue was glad to have, and Mr. McCurtis seized it with pleasure.

Rising from his seat, he picked up from where it lay across his desk a long, thin switch, and started toward the four barefooted lads, who were admiring the circus pictures.

Nothing could have been more inviting, for, not only were they barefooted, but each had his trousers rolled to

the knee, and Fred Sheldon had drawn and squeezed his so far that they could go no further. His plump, clean legs offered the most inviting temptation to the teacher, who was one of those sour old pedagogues, of the long ago, who delighted in seeing children tortured under the guise of so-called discipline.

"I don't believe in wearing trousers in warm weather," said Fred, when anybody looked wonderingly to see whether he really had such useful garments on, "and that's why I roll mine so high up. Don't you see I'm ready to run into the water, and——"

"How about going through the bushes and briars?" asked Joe Hunt.

"I don't go through 'em," was the crushing answer. "I feel so supple and limber that I just jump right over the top. I tell you, boys, that you ought to see me jump——"

Fred's wish was gratified, for at that moment he gave such an exhibition of jumping as none of his companions had ever seen before. With a shout he sprang high in air, kicking out his bare legs in a frantic way, and ran with might and main for the school-house.

The other three lads did pretty much the same, for the appearance of the teacher among them was made known by the whizzing hiss of his long, slender switch, which first landed on Fred's legs, and was then quickly transferred to the lower limbs of the other boys, the little company immediately heading for the school house, with Fred Sheldon at the front.

Each one shouted, and made a high and frantic leap

every few steps, believing that the teacher was close behind him with upraised stick, and looking for the chance to bring it down with effect.

"I'll teach you not to stand gaping at those pictures," shouted Mr. McCurtis, striding wrathfully after them.

A man three-score years old cannot be expected to be as active as a boy with one-fifth as many years; but the teacher had the advantage of being very tall and quite attenuated, and for a short distance he could outrun any of his pupils.

The plump, shapely legs of Fred Sheldon, twinkling and doubling under him as he ran, seemed to be irresistibly tempting to Mr. McCurtis, who, with upraised switch, dashed for him like a thunder-gust, paying no attention to the others, who ducked aside as he passed.

"It's your fault, you young scapegrace," called out the pursuer, as he rapidly overhauled him; "you haven't been thinking of anything else but circuses for the past month and I mean to whip it out of you—good gracious sakes!"

Fred Sheldon had seen how rapidly the teacher was gaining, and finding there was no escape, resorted to the common trick among boys of suddenly falling flat on his face while running at full speed.

The cruel-hearted teacher at that very moment made a savage stroke, intending to raise a ridge on the flesh of the lad, who escaped it by a hair's breadth, as may be said.

The spiteful blow spent itself in vacancy, and the momentum spun Mr. McCurtis around on one foot, so that

he faced the other way. At that instant his heels struck the prostrate form of the crouching boy, and he went over, landing upon his back, his legs pointing upward, like a pair of huge dividers.

There is nothing a boy perceives so quickly as a chance for fun, and before the teacher could rise, Sammy McClay also went tumbling over the grinning Fred Sheldon, with such violence, indeed, that he struck the bewildered instructor as he was trying to adjust his spectacles to see where he was.

Then came Joe Hunt and Jimmy Emery, and Fred Sheldon capped the climax by running at full speed and jumping on the struggling group, spreading out his arms and legs in the effort to bear them down to the earth.

But the difficulty was that Fred was not very heavy nor bony, so that his presence on top caused very little inconvenience, the teacher rising so hurriedly that Fred fell from his shoulders, and landed on his head when he struck the earth.

The latter was dented, but Fred wasn't hurt at all, and he and his friends scrambled hastily into the school-house, where the other children were in an uproar, fairly dancing with delight at the exhibition, or rather "circus," as some of them called it, which took place before the school-house and without any expense to them.

By the time the discomfited teacher had got upon his feet and shaken himself together, the four lads were in school, busily engaged in scratching their legs and studying their lessons.

Mr. McCurtis strode in a minute later switch in hand, and in such a grim mood that he could only quiet his nerves by walking around the room and whipping every boy in it.

CHAPTER III.

STARTLING NEWS.

FRED SHELDON was the only child of a widow, who lived on a small place a mile beyond the village, and managed to eke out a living thereon, assisted by a small pension from the government, her husband having been killed during the late war.

A half-mile beyond stood a large building, gray with age and surrounded with trees, flowers and climbing vines. The broad bricks of which it was composed were known to have been brought from Holland long before the revolution, and about the time when George Washington was hunting for the cherry-tree with his little hatchet.

In this old structure lived the sisters Perkinpine—Annie and Lizzie—who were nearly seventy years of age. They were twins, had never been married, were generally known to be wealthy, but preferred to live entirely by themselves, with no companion but three or four cats, and not even a watch-dog.

Their ancestors were among the earliest settlers of the section, and the Holland bricks could show where they had been chipped and broken by the bullets of the Indians who howled around the solid old structure,

through the snowy night, as ravenous as so many wolves to reach the cowering women and children within.

The property had descended to the sisters in regular succession, and there could be no doubt they were rich in valuable lands, if in nothing else. Their retiring disposition repelled attention from their neighbors, but it was known there was much old and valuable silver, and most probably money itself, in the house.

Michael Heyland was their hired man, but he lived in a small house some distance away, where he always spent his nights.

Young Fred Sheldon was once sent over to the residence of the Misses Perkinpine after a heavy snow-storm, to see whether he could do anything for the old ladies. He was then only ten years old, but his handsome, ruddy face, his respectful manner, and his cheerful eagerness to oblige them, thawed a great deal of their natural reserve, and they gradually came to like him.

He visited the old brick house quite often, and frequently bore substantial presents to his mother, though, rather curiously, the old ladies never asked that she should pay them a visit.

The Misses Perkinpine lived very well indeed, and Fred Sheldon was not long in discovering it. When he called there he never could get away without eating some of the vast hunks of gingerbread and enormous pieces of thick, luscious pie, of which Fred, like all boys, was very fond.

There was no denying that Fred had established himself as a favorite in that peculiar household, as he well deserved to be.

On the afternoon succeeding his switching at school, he reached home and did his chores, whistling cheerily in the meanwhile, and thinking of little else than the great circus on the morrow, when he suddenly stopped in surprise upon seeing a carriage standing in front of the gate.

Just then his mother called him to the house and explained:

"Your Uncle William is quite ill, Fred, and has sent for me. You know he lives twelve miles away, and it will take us a good while to get there; if you are afraid to stay here alone you can go with us."

Fred was too quick to trip himself in that fashion. To-morrow was circus day, and if he went to his Uncle Will's, he might miss it.

"Miss Annie asked me this morning to go over and see them again," he said, alluding to one of the Misses Perkinpine, "and they'll be mighty glad to have me there."

"That will be much better, for you will be so near home that you can come over in the morning and see that everything is right, but I'm afraid you'll eat too much pie and cake and pudding and preserves."

"I ain't afraid," laughed Fred, who kissed his mother good-by and saw the carriage vanish down the road in the gloom of the gathering darkness. Then he busied himself with the chores, locked up the house and put everything in shape preparatory to going away.

He was still whistling, and was walking rapidly toward the gate, when he was surprised and a little startled by

observing the figure of a man, standing on the outside, as motionless as a stone, and no doubt watching him.

He appeared to be ill-dressed, and Fred at once set him down as one of those pests of society known as a tramp, who had probably stopped to get something to eat.

"What do you want?" asked the lad, with an air of bravery which he was far from feeling, as he halted within two or three rods of the unexpected guest, ready to retreat if it should become necessary.

"I want you to keep a civil tongue in your head," was the answer, in a harsh rasping voice.

"I didn't mean to be uncivil," was the truthful reply of Fred, who believed in courtesy to every one.

"Who lives here, then?" asked the other in the same gruff voice.

"My mother, Mrs. Mary Sheldon, and myself, but my mother isn't at home."

The stranger was silent a moment, and then looking around, as if to make sure that no one was within hearing, asked in a lower voice:

"Can you tell me where the Miss Perkinpines live?"

"Right over yonder," was the response of the boy, pointing toward the house, which was invisible in the darkness, but a star-like twinkle of light showed where it was, surrounded by trees and shrubbery.

Fred came near adding that he was on his way there, and would show him the road, but a sudden impulse restrained him.

The tramp-like individual peered through the gloom in the direction indicated, and then inquired:

"How fur is it?"

"About half a mile."

The stranger waited another minute or so, as if debating with himself whether he should ask some other questions that were in his mind; but, without another word, he moved away and speedily disappeared from the road.

Although he walked for several paces on the rough gravel in front of the gate, the lad did not hear the slightest sound. He must have been barefooted, or more likely, wore rubber shoes.

Fred Sheldon could not help feeling very uncomfortable over the incident itself. The question about the old ladies, and the man's looks and manner impressed him that he meant ill toward his good friends, and Fred stood a long time asking himself what he ought to do.

He thought of going down to the village and telling Archie Jackson, the bustling little constable, what he feared, or of appealing to some of the neighbors; and pity it is he did not do so, but he was restrained by the peculiar disposition of the Misses Perkinpine, who might be very much displeased with him.

As he himself was about the only visitor they received, and as they had lived so long by themselves, they would not thank him, to say the least—that is, viewing the matter from his standpoint.

"I'll tell the ladies about it," he finally concluded, "and we'll lock the doors and sit up all night. I wish they had three or four dogs and a whole lot of guns; or if I had a lasso," he added, recalling one of the circus

pictures, "and the tramp tried to get in, I'd throw it over his head and pull him half way to the top of the house and let him hang there until he promised to behave himself."

Fred's head had been slightly turned by the circus posters, and it can hardly be said that he was the best guard the ladies could have in case there were any sinister designs on the part of the tramp.

But the boy was sure he was never more needed at the old brick house than he was on that night, and hushing his whistle, he started up the road in the direction taken by the stranger.

It was a trying ordeal for the little fellow, whose chief fear was that he would overtake the repulsive individual and suffer for interfering with his plans.

There was a faint moon in the sky, but its light now and then was obscured by the clouds which floated over its face. Here and there, too, were trees, beneath whose shadows the boy stepped lightly, listening and looking about him, and imagining more than once he saw the figure dreaded so much.

But he observed nothing of him, nor did he meet any of his neighbors, either in wagons or on foot, and his heart beat tumultuously when he drew near the grove of trees, some distance back from the road, in the midst of which stood the old Holland brick mansion.

To reach it it was necessary to walk through a short lane, lined on either hand by a row of stately poplars, whose shade gave a cool twilight gloom to the intervening space at mid-day.

"Maybe he isn't here, after all," said Fred to himself, as he passed through the gate of the picket fence surrounding the house, "and I guess——"

Just then the slightest possible rustling caught his ear, and he stepped back behind the trunk of a large weeping willow.

He was not mistaken; some one was moving through the shrubbery at the corner of the house, and the next minute the frightened boy saw the tramp come stealthily to view, and stepping close to the window of the dining-room, peer into it.

As the curtain was down it was hard to see how he could discover anything of the inmates, but he may have been able to detect something of the interior by looking through at the side of the curtain, or possibly he was only listening.

At any rate he stood thus but a short time, when he withdrew and slowly passed from view around the corner.

The instant he was gone Fred moved forward and knocked softly on the door, so softly indeed, that he had to repeat it before some one approached from the inside and asked who was there.

When his voice was recognized the bolt was withdrawn and he was most cordially welcomed by the old ladies, who were just about to take up their knitting and sewing, having finished their tea.

When Fred told them he had come to stay all night and hadn't had any supper, they were more pleased than ever, and insisted that he should go out and finish a

large amount of gingerbread, custard and pie, for the latter delicacy was always at command.

"I'll eat some," replied Fred, "but I don't feel very hungry."

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Miss Annie, peering over her spectacles in alarm; "are you sick? If you are we've got lots of castor oil and rhubarb and jalap and boneset; shall I mix you up some?"

"O my gracious! no—don't mention 'em again; I ain't sick that way—I mean I'm scared."

"Scared at what? Afraid there isn't enough supper for you?" asked Miss Lizzie, looking smilingly down upon the handsome boy.

"I tell you," said Fred, glancing from one to the other, "I think there's a robber going to try and break into your house to-night and steal everything you've got, and then he'll kill you both, and after that I'm sure he means to burn down the house, and that'll be the last all of you and your cats."

When the young visitor made such a prodigious declaration, he supposed the ladies would scream and probably faint away. But the very hugeness of the boy's warning caused emotions the reverse of what he anticipated.

They looked kindly at him a minute or so and then quietly smiled.

"What a little coward you are, Fred," said Miss Annie; "surely there is nobody who would harm two old creatures like us."

"But they want your money," persisted Fred, still standing in the middle of the floor.

Both ladies were too truthful to deny that they had any, even to such a child, and Lizzie said:

"We haven't enough to tempt anybody to do such a great wrong."

"You can't tell about that; then I 'spose some of those silver dishes must be worth a great deal."

"Yes, so they are," said Annie, "and we prize them the most because our great, great, great-grandfather brought them over the sea a good many years ago, and they have always been in our family."

"But," interposed Lizzie, "we lock them up every night."

"What in?"

"A great big strong chest."

"Anybody could break it open, though."

"Yes, but it's locked; and you know it's against the law to break a lock."

"Well," said Fred, with a great sigh, "I hope there won't anybody disturb you, but I hope you will fasten all the windows and doors to-night."

"We always do; and then," added the benign old lady, raising her head so as to look under her spectacles in the face of the lad, "you know we have you to take care of us."

"Have you got a gun in the house?"

"Mercy, yes; there's one over the fire-place, where father put it forty years ago."

"Is there anything the matter with it?"

"Nothing, only the lock is broke off, and I think father said the barrel was bursted."

Fred laughed in spite of himself.

"What under the sun is such an old thing good for?"

"It has done us just as much good as if it were a new cannon—but come out to your supper."

The cheerful manner of the old ladies had done much to relieve Fred's mind of his fears, and a great deal of his natural appetite came back to him.

He walked into the kitchen, where he seated himself at a table on which was spread enough food for several grown persons, and telling him he must not leave any of it to be wasted, the ladies withdrew, closing the door behind them, so that he might not be embarrassed by their presence.

"I wonder whether there's any use of being scared," said Fred to himself, as he first sunk his big, sound teeth into a huge slice of buttered short-cake, on which some peach jam had been spread! "If I hadn't seen that tramp looking in at the window I wouldn't feel so bad, and I declare," he added in dismay, "when they questioned me, I never thought to tell 'em that. Never mind, I'll give 'em the whole story when I finish five or six slices of this short-cake and some ginger-cake, and three or four pieces of pie, and then, I think, they'll believe I'm right."

For several minutes the boy devoted himself entirely to his meal, and had the good ladies peeped through the door while he was thus employed they would have been highly pleased to see how well he was getting along.

"I wish I was an old maid and hadn't anything to do but to cook nice food like this and play with the cats—my gracious!"

Just then the door creaked, and, looking up, Fred Sheldon saw to his consternation the very tramp of whom he had been thinking walk into the room and approach the table.

His clothing was ragged and unclean, a cord being drawn around his waist to keep his coat together, while the collar was up so high about his neck that nothing of the shirt was visible.

His hair was frowsy and uncombed, as were his huge yellow whiskers, which seemed to grow up almost to his eyes, and stuck out like the quills on a porcupine.

As the intruder looked at the boy and shuffled toward him, in his soft rubber shoes, he indulged in a broad grin, which caused his teeth to shine through his scraggly beard.

He held his hat, which resembled a dishcloth, as much as anything, in his hand, and was all suavity.

His voice sounded as though he had a bad cold, with now and then an odd squeak. As he bowed he said:

"Good evening, young man; I hope I don't intrude."

As he approached the table and helped himself to a chair, the ladies came along behind him, Miss Lizzie saying:

"This poor man, Frederick, has had nothing to eat for three days, and is trying to get home to his family. I'm sure you will be glad to have him sit at the table with you."

"Yes, I'm awful glad," replied the boy, almost choking with the fib. "I was beginning to feel kind of lonely, but I'm through and he can have the table to himself."

"You said you were a shipwrecked sailor, I believe?" was the inquiring remark of Miss Lizzie, as the two sisters stood in the door, beaming kindly on the tramp, who began to play havoc with the eatables before him.

"Yes, mum; we was shipwrecked on the Jarsey coast; I was second mate and all was drowned but me. I hung to the rigging for three days and nights in the awfulest snow storm you ever heard of."

"Mercy goodness," gasped Annie; "when was that?"

"Last week," was the response, as the tramp wrenched the leg of a chicken apart with hands and teeth.

"Do they have snow storms down there in summer time?" asked Fred, as he moved away from the table.

The tramp, with his mouth full of meat, and with his two hands grasping the chicken-bone between his teeth, stopped work and glared at the impudent youngster, as if he would look him through and through for daring to ask the question.

"Young man," said he, as he solemnly resumed operations, "of course, they have snow storms down there in summer time; I'm ashamed of your ignorance; you're rather small to put in when grown-up folks are talking, and I'd advise you to listen arter this."

Fred concluded he would do so, using his eyes meanwhile.

"Yes, mum," continued the tramp; "I was in the rigging for three days and nights, and then was washed off by the breakers and carried ashore, where I was robbed of all my clothing, money and jewels."

"Deary, deary me!" exclaimed the sisters in concert.
"How dreadful."

"You are right, ladies, and I've been tramping ever since."

"How far away is your home?"

"Only a hundred miles, or so."

"You have a family, have you?"

"A wife and four babies—if they only knewed what their poor father had passed through—excuse these tears, mum."

The tramp just then gave a sniff and drew his sleeve across his forehead, but Fred Sheldon, who was watching him closely, did not detect anything like a tear.

But he noted something else, which had escaped the eyes of the kind-hearted ladies.

The movement of the arm before the face seemed to displace the luxuriant yellow beard. Instead of sitting on the countenance as it did at first, even in its ugliness, it was slewed to one side.

Only for a moment, however, for by a quick flirt of the hand, as though he were scratching his chin, he replaced it.

And just then Fred Sheldon noticed another fact. The hand with which this was done was as small, white and fair as that of a woman—altogether the opposite of that which would have been seen had the tramp's calling been what he claimed.

The ladies, after a few more thoughtful questions, withdrew, so that their guest might not feel any delicacy

in eating all he wished—an altogether unnecessary step on their part.

Fred went out with them, but after he had been gone a few minutes he slyly peeped through the crack of the door, without the ladies observing the impolite proceeding.

The guest was still doing his best in the way of satisfying his appetite, but he was looking around the room, at the ceiling, the floor, the doors, windows and fire-place, and indeed at everything, as though he was greatly interested in them, as was doubtless the case.

All at once he stopped and listened, glancing furtively at the door, as if he feared some one was about to enter the room.

Then he quietly rose, stepped quickly and noiselessly to one of the windows, took out the large nail which was always inserted over the sash at night to keep it fastened, put it in his pocket, and, with a half chuckle and grin, seated himself again at the table.

At the rate of eating which was displayed, he soon finished, and, wiping his greasy hands on his hair, he gave a great sigh of relief, picked up his slouchy hat, and moved toward the door leading to the room in which the ladies sat.

“I’m very much obleeged to you,” said he, bowing very low, as he shuffled toward the outer door, “and I shall ever remember you in my prayers; sorry I can’t pay you better, mums.”

The sisters protested they were more than repaid in the gratitude he showed, and they begged him, if he ever came that way, to call again.

He promised that he would be glad to do so, and departed.

"You may laugh all you're a mind to," said Fred, when he had gone, "but that's the man I saw peeping in the window, and he means to come back here to-night and rob you."

The boy told all that he knew, and the ladies, while not sharing his fright, agreed that it was best to take extra precautions in locking up.

CHAPTER IV.

ON GUARD.

THE SISTERS Perkinpine always retired early, and, candle in hand, they made the round of the windows and doors on the first floor.

When they came to the window from which the nail had been removed, Fred told them he had seen the tramp take it out, and he was sure he would try and enter there.

This served to add to the uneasiness of the sisters, but they had great confidence in the security of the house, which had never been disturbed by burglars, so far as they knew, in all its long history.

"The chest where we keep the silver and what little money we have," said Lizzie, "is up-stairs, next to the spare bed-room."

"Leave the door open and let me sleep there," said Fred, stoutly.

"Gracious alive, what can you do if they should come?" was the amazed inquiry.

"I don't know as I can do anything, but I can try; I want that old musket that's over the fire-place, too."

"Why, it will go off and kill you."

Fred insisted so strongly, however, that he was allowed

to climb upon a chair and take down the antiquated weapon, covered with rust and dust.

When he came to examine it he found that the description he had heard was correct—the ancient flint-lock was good for nothing, and the barrel, when last discharged, must have exploded at the breach, for it was twisted and split open, so that a load of powder could only injure the one who might fire it, were such a feat possible.

The sisters showed as much fear of it when it was taken down as though it were in good order, primed and cocked, and they begged the lad to restore it to its place as quickly as possible.

But he seemed to think he had charge of the business for the evening, and, bidding them good-night, he took his candle and went to his room, which he had occupied once or twice before.

It may well be asked what young Fred Sheldon expected to do with such a useless musket, should emergency arise demanding a weapon.

Indeed, the boy would have found it hard to tell himself, excepting that he hoped to scare the man or men away by the pretence of a power which he did not possess.

Now that the young hero was finally left alone, he felt that he had a most serious duty to perform.

The spare bedroom which was placed at his disposal was a large, old-fashioned apartment, with two windows front and rear, with a door opening into the next room, somewhat smaller in size, both being carpeted, while the

smaller contained nothing but a few chairs and a large chest, in which were silver and money worth several thousand dollars.

"I'll set the candle in there on the chest," concluded Fred, "and I'll stay in here with the gun. If he comes up-stairs and gets into the room I'll try and make him believe I've got a loaded rifle to shoot him with."

The door opening outward from each apartment had nothing but the old-style iron latch, large and strong, and fastened in place by turning down a small iron tongue.

It would take much effort to force such a door, but Fred had no doubt any burglar could do it, even though it were ten times as strong. He piled chairs against both, and then made an examination of the windows.

To his consternation, the covered porch extending along the front of the house, passed beneath every window, and was so low that it would be a very easy thing to step from the hypostyle to the entrance.

The room occupied by the ladies was in another part of the building, and much more inaccessible.

Young as Fred Sheldon was, he could not help wondering how it was that where everything was so inviting to burglars they had not visited these credulous and trusting sisters before.

"If that tramp, that I don't believe is a tramp, tries to get into the house he'll do it by one of the windows, for that one is fastened down stairs, and all he has to do is to climb up the portico and crawl in here."

The night was so warm that Fred thought he would

smother when he had fastened all the windows down, and he finally compromised by raising one of those at the back of the house, where he was sure there was the least danger of any one entering.

This being done, he sat down in a chair, with the rusty musket in his hand, and began his watch.

From his position he could see the broad, flat candlestick standing on the chest, with the dip already burned so low that it was doubtful whether it could last an hour longer.

"What's the use of that burning, anyway?" he asked himself; "that fellow isn't afraid to come in, and the candle will only serve to show him the way."

Acting under the impulse, he walked softly through the door to where the yellow light was burning, and with one puff extinguished it.

The wick glowed several minutes longer, sending out a strong odor, which pervaded both rooms. Fred watched it until all became darkness, and then he was not sure he had done a wise thing after all.

The trees on both sides of the house were so dense that their leaves shut out nearly all the moonlight which otherwise would have entered the room. Only a few rays came through the window of the other apartment, and these, striking the large, square chest showed its dim outlines, with the phantom-like candlestick on top.

Where Fred himself sat it was dark and gloomy, and his situation, we are sure all will admit, was enough to try the nerves of the strongest man, even if furnished with a good weapon of offence and defence.

"I hope the ladies will sleep," was the unselfish thought of the little hero, "for there isn't any use of their being disturbed when they can't do anything but scream, and a robber don't care for that."

One of the hardest things is to keep awake when exhausted by some unusual effort of the bodily or mental powers, and we all know under how many conditions it is utterly impossible.

The sentinel on the outpost or the watch on deck fights off his drowsiness by steadily pacing back and forth. If he sits down for a few minutes he is sure to succumb.

When Fremont, the pathfinder, was lost with his command in the Rocky Mountains, and was subjected to such arctic rigors in the dead of winter as befell the crew of the *Jeannette* in the ice-resounding oceans of the far north the professor, who accompanied the expedition for the purpose of making scientific investigations, warned all that their greatest peril lay in yielding to the drowsiness which the extreme cold would be sure to bring upon them. He begged them to resist it with all the energy of their natures, for in no other way could they escape with their lives.

And yet this same professor was the first one of the party to give up and to lie down for his last long sleep, from which it was all Fremont could do to arouse him.

Fred Sheldon felt that everything depended on him, and with the exaggerated fears that come to a youngster at such a time he was sure that if he fell asleep the evil man would enter the room, take all the money and plate and then sacrifice him.

"I could keep awake a week," he muttered, as he tipped his chair back against the wall, so as to rest easier, while he leaned the musket along side of him, in such position that it could be seized at a moment's warning.

The night remained solemn and still. Far in the distance he could hear the flow of the river, and from the forest, less than a mile away, seemed to come a murmur, like the "voice of silence" itself.

Now and then the crowing of a cock was answered by another a long distance off, and occasionally the soft night wind stirred the vegetation surrounding the house.

But among them all was no sound which the excited imagination could torture into such as would be made by a stealthy entrance into the house.

In short, everything was of the nature to induce sleep, and it was not yet ten o'clock when Fred began to wink, very slowly and solemnly, his grasp on the ruined weapon relaxed, his head bobbed forward several times and at last he was asleep.

As his mind had been so intensely occupied by thoughts of burglars and their evil doings, his dreams were naturally of the same unpleasant personages.

In his fancy he was sitting on the treasure-chest, unable to move, while an ogre-like creature climbed into the window, slowly raised an immense club and then brought it down on the head of the boy with a terrific crash.

With an exclamation of terror Fred awoke, and found

that he had fallen forward on his face, sprawling on the floor at full length, while the jar tipped the musket over so that it fell across him.

In his dream it had seemed that the burglar was a full hour climbing upon the roof and through the window, and yet the whole vision began and ended during the second or two occupied in falling from his chair.

In the confusion of the moment Fred was sure the man he dreaded was in the room, but when he had got back into the chair he was gratified beyond measure to find his mistake.

"I'm a pretty fellow to keep watch," he muttered, rubbing his eyes; "I don't suppose that I was awake more than a half hour. It must be past midnight, so I've had enough sleep to last me without any more of it before to-morrow night."

He resumed his seat, never more wide awake in all his life. It was not as late as he supposed, but the hour had come when it was all-important that he should keep his senses about him.

Hearing nothing unusual he rose to his feet and walked to the rear window and looked out. It was somewhat cooler and a gentle breeze felt very pleasant on his fevered face. The same stillness held reign, and he moved to the front, where he took a similar view.

So far as could be told, everything was right and he resumed his seat.

But at this juncture Fred was startled by a sound, the meaning of which he well knew.

Some one was trying hard to raise the dining-room

window—the rattling being such that there was no mistake about it.”

“It’s that tramp!” exclaimed the boy, all excitement, stepping softly into the next room and listening at the head of the stairs, “and he’s trying the window that he took the nail out of.”

The noise continued several minutes—long after the time, indeed, when the tramp must have learned that his trick had been discovered—and then all became still.

This window was the front, and Fred, in the hope of scaring the fellow away, raised the sash, and, leaning out, peered into the darkness and called out:

“Halloo, down there! What do you want?”

As may be supposed, there was no answer, and after waiting a minute or two, Fred concluded to give a warning.

“If I hear anything more of you, I’ll try and shoot; I’ve got a gun here and we’re ready for you!”

This threat ought to have frightened an ordinary person away, and the boy was not without a strong hope that it had served that purpose with the tramp whom he dreaded so much.

He thought he could discern his dark figure among the trees, but it was probably fancy, for the gloom was too great for his eyes to be of any use in that respect.

Fred listened a considerable while longer, and then, drawing his head within, said:

“I shouldn’t wonder if I had scared him off——”

Just then a soft step roused him, and turning his head,

he saw that the very tramp of whom he was thinking and of whom he believed he was happily rid, had entered the room, and was standing within a few feet of him.

CHAPTER V.

BRAVE WORK.

WHEN Fred Sheldon turned on his heel and saw the outlines of the tramp in the room behind him he gave a start and exclamation of fear, as the bravest man might have done under the circumstances.

The intruder chuckled and said in his rasping, creaking voice:

"Don't be skeert, young man; if you keep quiet you won't get hurt, but if you go to yelping or making any sort of noise I'll wring your head as if you was a chicken I wanted for dinner."

Fred made no answer to this, when the tramp added, in the same husky undertone, as he stepped forward in a threatening way:

"Do you hear what I said?"

"Yes, sir; I hear you."

"Well, just step back through that door in t'other room and watch me while I look through this chest for a gold ring I lost last week."

Poor Fred was in a terrible state of mind, and, passing softly through the door opening into his bed-room, he paused by the chair where he had sat so long, and then faced toward the tramp, who said, by way of amendment:

A YOUNG HERO.

"I forgot to say that if you try to climb out of the winder onto the porto rico or to sneak out any way I'll give you a touch of that."

As he spoke he suddenly held up a bull's-eye lantern, which poured a strong stream of light toward the boy. It looked as if he must have lighted it inside the house, and had come into the room with it under his coat.

While he carried this lantern in one hand he held a pistol, shining with polished silver, in the other, and behind the two objects the bearded face loomed up like that of some ogre of darkness.

The scamp did not seem to think this remark required anything in the way of response, and, kneeling before the huge oaken chest, he began his evil work.

For a few moments Fred was so interested that he ceased to reproach himself for having failed to do his duty.

The tramp set the lantern on the floor beside him, so that it threw its beams directly into the room where the boy stood.

The marauder, it must be said, did not act like a professional. One of the burglars who infest society to-day would have made short work with the lock, though it was of the massive and powerful kind, in use many years ago; but this person fumbled and worked a good while without getting it open.

He muttered impatiently to himself several times, and then caught up the bull's-eye, and, bending his head over, carefully examined it, to learn why it resisted his vigorous efforts.

The action of the man seemed to rouse Fred, who, without a moment's thought, stepped backward toward the open window at the rear, the one which had been raised all the time to afford ventilation.

He thought if the dreadful man should object, he could make excuse on account of the warmth of the night.

But the lad moved so softly, or the wicked fellow was so interested in his own work that he did not notice him, for he said nothing, and though Fred could see him no longer he could hear him toiling, with occasional mutterings of anger at his failure to open the chest, which was believed to contain so much valuable silverware and money.

The diverging rays from the dark-lantern still shot through the open door into the bed-room. They made a well-defined path along the floor, quite narrow and not very high, and which, striking the white wall at the opposite side, terminated in one splash of yellow, in which the specks of the whitewash could be plainly seen.

It was as if a great wedge of golden light lay on the floor, with the head against the wall and the tapering point passing through the door and ending at the chest in the other room.

While Fred Sheldon was looking at the curious sight he noticed something in the illuminated path. It would be thought that, in the natural fear of a boy in his situation, he would have felt no interest in it, but, led on by a curiosity which none but a lad feels, he stepped softly forward on tip-toe.

Before he stooped over to pick it up he saw that it was a handsome pocket-knife.

"He has dropped it," was the thought of Fred, who wondered how he came to do it; "anyway I'll hold on to it for awhile."

He quietly shoved it down into his pocket, where his old Barlow knife, his jewsharp, eleven marbles, two slate pencils, a couple of large coppers, some cake crumbs and other trifles nestled, and then, having succeeded so well, he again went softly to the open window at the rear.

Just as he reached it he heard an unusual noise in the smaller apartment where the man was at work, and he was sure the burglar had discovered what he was doing, and was about to punish him.

But the sound was not repeated, and the boy believed the tramp had got the chest open. If such were the fact, he was not likely to think of the youngster in the next room for several minutes more.

Fred was plucky, and the thought instantly came to him that he had a chance to leave the room and give an alarm; but to go to the front and climb out on the roof of the porch would bring him so close to the tramp that discovery would be certain.

At the rear there was nothing by which he could descend to the ground. It was a straight wall, invisible in the darkness and too high for any one to leap. He might hang down from the sill by his hands and then let go, but he was too unfamiliar with the surroundings to make such an attempt.

"Maybe there's a tub of water down there," he said to himself, trying to peer into the gloom; "and I might turn over and strike on my head into it, or it might be the swill barrel, and I wouldn't want to get my head and shoulders wedged into that——"

At that instant something as soft as a feather touched his cheek. The gentle night wind had moved the rustling limbs, so that one of them in swaying only a few inches had reached out, as it were, and kissed the chubby face of the brave little boy.

"Why didn't I think of that?" he asked himself, as he caught hold of the friendly limb. "I can hold on and swing to the ground."

It looked, indeed, as if such a movement was easy. By reaching his hand forward he could follow the limb until it was fully an inch in diameter. That was plenty strong enough to hold his weight.

Glancing around, he saw the same wedge of golden light streaming into the room, and the sounds were such that he was sure the burglar had opened the chest and was helping himself to the riches within.

The next minute Fred bent forward, and, gripping the limb with both hands, swung out of the window. All was darkness, and he shut his eyes and held his breath with that peculiar dizzy feeling which comes over one when he cowers before an expected blow on the head.

The sensation was that of rushing into the leaves and undergrowth, and then, feeling himself stopping rather suddenly, he let go.

He lighted upon his feet, the distance being so short

that he was scarcely jarred, and he drew a sigh of relief when he realized that his venture had ended so well.

"There," he said to himself, as he adjusted his clothing, "I ain't afraid of him now; I can outrun him if I only have a fair chance, and there's plenty of places where a fellow can hide."

Looking up to the house it was all dark; not a ray from the lantern could be seen, and the sisters were no doubt sleeping as sweetly as they had slept nearly every night for the past three-score years and more.

But Fred understood the value of time too well to stay in the vicinity while the tramp was engaged with his nefarious work above. If the law-breaker was to be caught, it must be done speedily.

But there were no houses near at hand, and it would take fully an hour to bring Archie Jackson, the constable, to the spot.

"The nearest house is Mike Heyland's, the hired man, and I'll go for him."

Filled with this thought, Fred moved softly around to the front, passed through the gate, entered the short lane, and began walking between the rows of trees in the direction of the highway.

An active boy of his age finds his most natural gait to be a trot, and Fred took up that pace.

"It's so dark here under these trees that if there's anything in the road I'll tumble over it, for I never miss ——"

"Halloo there, you boy!"

As these startling words fell upon young Sheldon's

ear, the figure of a man suddenly stepped out from the denser shadows and halted in front of the affrighted boy, who stopped short, wondering what it meant.

There was nothing in the voice and manner of the stranger, however, which gave confidence to Fred, who quickly rallied, and stepping closer, caught his hand with the confiding faith of childhood.

"O, I'm so glad to see you! I was afraid I'd have to run clear to Tottenville to find somebody."

"What's the matter, my little man?"

"Why, there's a robber in the house back there; he's stealing all the silver and money that belongs to the Misses Perkinpine, and they're sound asleep—just think of it—and he's got a lantern up there and is at work at the chest now, and said he would shoot me if I made any noise or tried to get away, but I caught hold of a limb and swung out the window, and here I am!" exclaimed Fred, stopping short and panting.

"Well now, that's lucky, for I happen to have a good, loaded pistol with me. I'm visiting Mr. Spriggins in Tottenville, and went out fishing this afternoon, but stayed longer than I intended, and was going home across lots when I struck the lane here without knowing exactly where I was; but I'm glad I met you."

"So'm I," exclaimed the gratified Fred; "will you help me catch that tramp?"

"Indeed I will; come on, my little man."

The stranger stepped off briskly, Fred close behind him, and passed through the gate at the front of the old brick house, which looked as dark and still as though no living person had been in it for years.

"Don't make any noise," whispered the elder, turning part way round and raising his finger.

"You needn't be afraid of my doing so," replied the boy, who was sure the caution was unnecessary.

Fred did not notice the fact at the time that the man who had come along so opportunely seemed to be quite familiar with the place, but he walked straight to a rear window, which, despite the care with which it had been fastened down, was found to be raised.

"There's where he went in," whispered Fred's friend, "and there's where we're going after him."

"All right," said Fred, who did not hesitate, although he could not see much prospect of his doing anything. "I'll follow."

The man reached up and catching hold of the sash placed his feet on the sill and stepped softly into the room. Then turning so his figure could be seen plainly in the moonlight, he said in the same guarded voice:

"He may hear me coming, do you, therefore, go round to the front and if he tries to climb down by way of the porch, run round here and let me know. We'll make it hot for him."

This seemed a prudent arrangement, for it may be said, it guarded all points. The man who had just entered would prevent the thieving tramp from retreating by the path he used in entering, while the sharp eyes of the boy would be quick to discover him the moment he sought to use the front window.

"I guess we've got him," thought Fred, as he took his station by the front porch and looked steadily

upward, like one who is studying the appearance of a new comet or some constellation in the heavens; "that man going after him ain't afraid of anything, and he looks strong and big enough to take him by the collar and shake him, just as Mr. McCurtis shakes us boys when he wants to exercise himself.

For several minutes the vigilant Fred was in a flutter of excitement, expecting to hear the report of firearms and the sound of struggling on the floor above.

"I wonder if Miss Annie and Lizzie will wake up when the shooting begins," thought Fred; "I don't suppose they will, for they are so used to sleeping all night that nothing less than a big thunder-storm will start them—but it seems to me it's time that something took place."

Young Sheldon had the natural impatience of youth, and when ten minutes passed without stirring up matters, he thought his friend was too slow in his movements.

Besides, his neck began to ache from looking so steadily upward, so he walked back in the yard some distance, and leaning against a tree, shoved his hands down in his pockets and continued the scrutiny.

This made it more pleasant for a short time only, when he finally struck the happy expedient of lying down on his side and then placing his head upon his hand in such an easy position that the ache vanished at once.

Fifteen more minutes went by, and Fred began to wonder what it all meant. It seemed to him that fully

an hour had gone since stationing himself as a watcher, and not the slightest sound had come back to tell him that any living person was in the house.

"There's something wrong about this," he finally exclaimed, springing to his feet; "maybe the tramp got away before I came back; but then, if that's so, why didn't the other fellow find it out long ago?"

Loth to leave his post, Fred moved cautiously among the trees a while longer, and still failing to detect anything that would throw light on the mystery, he suddenly formed a determination, which was a rare one, indeed, for a lad of his years.

"I'll go in and find out for myself!"

"Boy-like, having made the resolve, he acted upon it without stopping to think what the cost might be. He was in his bare feet, and it was an easy matter for a little fellow like him to climb through an open window on the first floor without making a noise.

When he got into the room, however, where it was as dark as the darkest midnight he ever saw, things began to appear different, that is so far as anything can be said to appear where it is invisible.

He could see nothing at all, and reaching out his hands, he began shuffling along in that doubting manner which we all use under such circumstances.

He knew that he was in the dining-room, from which it was necessary to pass through a door into the broad hall, and up the stairs to the spare room, where it was expected he would sleep whenever he favored the twin maiden sisters with a visit.

He could find his way there in the dark, but he was afraid of the obstructions in his path.

"I 'spose all the chairs have been set out of the way, 'cause Miss Annie and Lizzie are very particular, and they wouldn't ——"

Just then Fred's knee came against a chair, and before he could stop himself, he fell over it with a racket which he was sure would awaken the ladies themselves.

"That must have jarred every window in the house," he gasped, rubbing his knees.

He listened for a minute or two before starting on again, but the same profound stillness reigned. It followed, as a matter of course, that the men up-stairs had heard the tumult, but Fred consoled himself with the belief that it was such a tremendous noise that they would mistake its meaning altogether.

"Any way, I don't mean to fall over any more chairs," muttered the lad, shuffling along with more care, and holding his hands down, so as to detect such an obstruction.

It is hardly necessary to tell what followed. Let any one undertake to make his way across a dark room, without crossing his hands in front and the edge of a door is sure to get between them.

Fred Sheldon received a bump which made him see stars, but after rubbing his forehead for a moment he moved out into the broad hall, where there was no more danger of anything of the kind.

The heavy oaken stairs were of such solid structure that when he placed his foot on the steps they gave back

no sound, and he stepped quite briskly to the top without making any noise that could betray his approach.

"I wonder what they thought when I tumbled over the chair," pondered Fred, who began to feel more certain than before that something was amiss.

Reaching out his hands in the dark he found that the door of his own room was wide open, and he walked in without trouble.

As he did so a faint light which entered by the rear window gave him a clear idea of the interior.

With his heart beating very fast Fred tip-toed toward the front until he could look through the open door into the small room where the large oaken chest stood.

By this time the moon was so high that he could see the interior with more distinctness than before.

All was still and deserted; both the men were gone.

"That's queer," muttered the puzzled lad; "if the tramp slipped away, the other man that I met on the road ought to have found it out; but what's become of him?"

Running his hand deep down among the treasures in his trousers pocket, Fred fished out a lucifer match, which he drew on the wall, and, as the tiny twist of flame expanded, he touched it to the wick of the candle that he held above his head.

The sight which met his gaze was a curious one indeed, and held him almost breathless for the time.

The lid of the huge chest was thrown back against the wall, and all that was within it were rumpled sheets of old brown paper, which had no doubt been used as wrappings for the pieces of the silver tea-service.

On the floor beside the chest was a large pocket-book, wrong side out. This, doubtless, had once held the money belonging to the old ladies, but it held it no longer.

Money and silverware were gone!

"The tramp got away while we were down the lane," said Fred, as he stood looking at the signs of ruin about him; but why didn't my friend let me know about it, and where is he?"

Fred Sheldon stopped in dismay, for just then the whole truth came upon him like a flash.

These two men were partners, and the man in the lane was on the watch to see that no strangers approached without the alarm being given to the one inside the house.

"Why didn't I think of that?" mentally exclaimed the boy, so overcome that he dropped into a chair, helpless and weak, holding the candle in hand.

It is easy to see how natural it was for a lad of his age to be deceived as was Fred Sheldon, who never in all his life had been placed in such a trying position.

He sat for several minutes looking at the open chest, which seemed to speak so eloquently of the wrong it had suffered, and then he reproached himself for having failed so completely in doing his duty.

"I can't see anything I've done," he thought, "which could have been of any good, while there was plenty of chances to make some use of myself if I had any sense about me."

Indeed there did appear to be some justice in the self-reproach of the lad, who added in the same vein:

"I knew, the minute he stopped to ask questions at our front gate, that he meant to come here and rob the house, and I ought to have started right off for Constable Jackson, without running to tell the folks. Then they laughed at me and I thought I was mistaken, even after I had seen him peeping through the window. When he was eating his supper I was sure of it, and then I should have slipped away and got somebody else here to help watch, but we didn't have anything to shoot with, and when I tried to keep guard I fell asleep, and when I woke up I was simple enough to think there was only one way of his coming into the house, and, while I had my eye on that, he walked right in behind me."

Then, as Fred recalled his meeting with the second party in the lane, he heaved a great sigh.

"Well, I'm the biggest blockhead in the country—that's all—and I hope I won't have to tell anybody the whole story. Halloo!"

Just then he happened to think of the pocket-knife he had picked up on the floor, and he drew it out of his pocket. Boy-like, his eyes sparkled with pleasure when they rested on the implement so indispensable to every youngster, and which was much the finest one he had ever had in his hand.

The handle was pearl and the two blades were of the finest steel and almost as keen as a razor.

Fred set the candle on a chair, and leaning over, carefully examined the knife, which seemed to grow in beauty the more he handled it.

"The man that dropped that is the one who stole all

the silverware and money, and there's the letters of his name," added the boy.

True enough. On the little piece of brass on the side of the handle were roughly cut the letters, "N. H. H."

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CHAPTER VI.

ON THE OUTSIDE.

WHEN Fred Sheldon had spent some minutes examining the knife he had picked up from the floor, he opened and closed the blades several times, and finally dropped it into his pocket, running his hand to the bottom to make sure there was no hole through which the precious implement might be lost.

"I think that knife is worth about a thousand dollars," he said, with a great sigh; "and if Aunt Lizzie and Annie don't get their silverware and money back, why they can hold on to the jack-knife."

At this juncture it struck the lad as a very strange thing that the two ladies should sleep in one part of the house and leave their valuables in another. It would have been more consistent if they had kept the chest in their own sleeping apartment, but they were very peculiar in some respects, and there was no accounting for many things they did.

"Maybe they went in there!" suddenly exclaimed Fred, referring to the tramp and his friend. "They must have thought it likely there was something in their bed-room worth hunting for. I'll see."

He felt faint at heart at the thought that the good ladies had been molested while they lay unconscious in

bed, but he pushed his way through the house, candle in hand, with the real bravery which was a part of his nature.

His heart was throbbing rapidly when he reached the door of their apartment and softly raised the latch.

But it was fastened from within, and when he listened he distinctly heard the low, gentle breathing of the good souls who had slumbered so quietly all through these exciting scenes.

"I am so thankful they haven't been disturbed," said Fred, making his way back to his own room, where he blew out his light, said his prayers and jumped into bed.

Despite the stirring experiences through which he had passed, and the chagrin he felt over his stupidity, Fred soon dropped into a sound slumber, which lasted until the sun shone through the window.

Even then it was broken by the gentle voice of Aunt Lizzie, as she was sometimes called, sounding from the foot of the stairs.

Fred was dressed and down in a twinkling, and in the rushing, headlong, helter-skelter fashion of youngsters of his age, he told the story of the robbery that had been committed during the night.

The old ladies listened quietly, but the news was exciting, indeed, and when Aunt Lizzie, the mildest soul that ever lived, said:

"I hope you are mistaken, Fred; after breakfast we'll go up-stairs and see for ourselves."

"I shall see now," said her sister Annie, starting up the steps, followed by Fred and the other.

There they quickly learned the whole truth. Eight hundred and odd dollars were in the pocketbook, and the intrinsic worth of the silver tea service amounted to fully three times as much, while ten times that sum would not have persuaded the ladies to part with it.

They were thrown into dismay by the loss, which grew upon them as they reflected over it.

"Why didn't you call us?" asked the white-faced Aunt Lizzie.

"Why, what would you have done if I had called you?" asked Fred, in turn.

"We would have talked with them and shown them what a wicked thing they were doing, and reminded them how unlawful and wrong it is to pick a lock and steal things."

"Gracious alive! if I had undertaken to call you that first man would have shot me, and it was lucky he didn't see me when I swung out the back window; but they left something behind them which I'd rather have than all your silver," said Fred.

"What's that?"

He drew out the pocket-knife and showed it, looking so wistfully that they did not even take it from his hand, but told the gleeful lad to keep it for himself.

"You may be sure I will," was his comment as he stowed it away once more; "a boy don't get a chance at a knife like that more than once in a lifetime."

The old ladies, mild and sweet-tempered as they were, became so faint and weak as they fully realized their loss, that they could eat no breakfast at all, and only swallowed a cup of coffee.

Fred was affected in the same manner, but not to so great an extent. However, he was anxious to do all he could for the good ladies, and spending only a few minutes at the table he donned his hat and said he would go for Constable Archie Jackson.

The hired man, Michael Heyland, had arrived, and was at work out-doors, so there was no call for the boy to remain longer.

As Fred hastened down the lane, he was surprised to hear sounds of martial music, but when he caught sight of a gorgeous band and a number of square, box-like wagons with yellow animals painted on the outside, he recalled that this was the day of the circus, and his heart gave a great bound of delight.

"I wish Miss Annie and Lizzie hadn't lost their money and silver," he said, "for maybe I could have persuaded them to go to the circus with me, and I'm sure they would have enjoyed themselves."

Running forward, Fred perched himself on the fence until the last wagon rattled by, when he slipped to the ground and trotted behind it, feeling that delight which comes to all lads in looking upon the place where wild animals are known to be housed.

At every dwelling they passed the inmates hastened out, and the musicians increased the volume of their music until the air seemed to throb and pulsate with the stirring strains.

When the town of Tottenville was reached, the whole place was topsy-turvy. The men and wagons, with the tents and poles, had been on the ground several hours,

hard at work, and crowds had been watching them from the moment of their arrival.

As the rest of the vehicles gathered in a circle, which was to be enclosed by the canvas, the interest was of such an intense character that literally nothing else was seen or thought of by the countrymen and villagers.

There was no one who gaped with more open-mouthed wonder than Fred Sheldon, who forgot for the time the real business which had brought him to Tottenville. As usual, he had his trousers rolled high above his knees, and with his hands deep in his pockets, walked about with his straw hat flapping in the slight breeze, staring at everything relating to the menagerie and circus, and tasting beforehand the delights that awaited him in the afternoon, when he would be permitted to gaze until tired, if such a thing were possible.

"That's the cage that has the great African lion," said Fred to Jimmy Emery and Joe Hunt, who stood beside him; "just look at that picture where he's got a man in his jaws, running off with him, and not caring a cent for the hunters firing at him."

"Them's Tottenhots," said Joe Hunt, who was glad of a chance of airing his knowledge of natural history; "they live in the upper part of Africa, on the Hang Ho river, close to London."

"My gracious," said Fred, with a laugh; "you've got Europe, Asia and Africa all mixed up, and the people are the Hottentots; there isn't anybody in the world with such a name as Tottenhots."

"Yes, there is, too; ain't we folks that live in Tottenville Tottenhots, smarty?"

"Let's ask that big boy there about them; he belongs to the show."

The young man to whom they alluded stood a short distance off, with a long whip in his hand, watching the operations of those who were erecting the canvas. He was quite red in the face, had a bushy head of hair almost of the same hue, and was anything but attractive in appearance.

His trousers were tucked in his boot-tops; he wore a blue shirt, sombrero-like hat, and was smoking a strong briar-wood pipe, occasionally indulging in some remark in which there was a shocking amount of profanity.

The boys started toward him, and had nearly reached him when Jimmy Emery said in an excited undertone:

"Why, don't you see who he is? He's Bud Heyland."

"So he is. His father told me last spring he had gone off to join a circus, but I forgot all about it."

Bud Heyland was the son of Michael Heyland, the man who did the work for the sisters Perkinpine, and before he left was known as the bully of the neighborhood.

He was a year or two older than the oldest in school, and he played the tyrant among the other youngsters, whose life sometimes became a burden to them when he was near.

He generally punished two or three of the lads each day after school for some imaginary offense. If they told the teacher, he would scold and threaten Bud, who would tell some outlandish falsehood, and then whip the boys again for telling tales.

If they appealed to Mr. McCurtis, the same programme was gone through as before; and as the original victims continued to be worsted, they finally gave it up as a losing business and bore their sorrows uncomplainingly.

Fred Sheldon tried several times to get up a confederation against the bully, with a view of bringing him to justice, but the others were too timid, and nothing came from it.

Bud was especially ugly in his actions toward Fred, who had no father to take the matter in hand, while Mr. Heyland himself simply smoked his pipe and grunted out that he couldn't do anything with Bud and had given him up long ago.

Finally Mr. McCurtis lost all patience, and summoning his energies he flogged the young scamp most thoroughly and then bundled him out of the door, forbidding him to come to school any more.

This suited Bud, who hurled several stones through the window, and then went home, stayed several days and finally went off with a circus, with one of whose drivers he had formed an acquaintance.

The boys were a little backward when they recognized Bud, but concluded he would be glad to see them, especially as they all intended to visit the menagerie during the afternoon.

"Halloo, Bud!" called out Fred, with a grin, as he and his two friends approached; "how are you?"

The boy, who was sixteen years old, turned about and looked at them for a minute, and then asked:

"Is that you, younkers? What'er you doin' here?"

"Oh, looking around a little. We're all coming this afternoon."

"You are, eh? Do you expect to crawl under the tent?"

"No, we're going to pay our way in; Jim and Joe didn't know whether they could come or not, but it's all fixed now."

"I watch outside with this cart-whip for boys that try to crawl under, and it's fun when I bring the lash down on 'em. Do you see?"

As he spoke, Bud gave a flourish with the whip, whirling the lash about his head and causing it to snap like a firecracker.

CHAPTER VII.

"THE LION IS LOOSE!"

I'LL SHOW you how it works," he called out, with a grin, and without a word of warning he whirled it about the legs and bodies of the boys, who jumped with pain and started to run.

He followed them just as the teacher did before, delivering blows rapidly, every one of which fairly burned and blistered where it struck. Bud laughed and enjoyed it, because he was inflicting suffering, and he would have caused serious injury had not one of the men shouted to him to stop.

Bud obeyed, catching the end of the lash in the hand which held the whipstock, and slouching back to his position, said:

"They wanted me to give 'em free tickets, and 'cause I wouldn't they told me they were going to crawl under the tent; so I thought I would let 'em have a little taste beforehand."

"You mustn't be quite so ready," said the man; some time you will get into trouble."

"It wan't be the first time," said Bud, looking with a grin at the poor boys, all three of whom were crying with pain; "and I reckon I can get out ag'in, as I've done often enough."

Fred Sheldon, after edging away from the other lads and his friends, all of whom were pitying him, recalled that he had come into the village of Tottenville to see the constable, Archie Jackson, and to tell him about the robbery that had been committed at the residence of the Misses Perkinpine the preceding evening.

Archie, a short, bustling, somewhat pompous man, who turned in his toes when he walked, was found among the crowd that were admiring the circus and menagerie, and was soon made acquainted with the alarming occurrence.

"Just what might have been expected," he said, severely, when he had heard the particulars; "it was some of them circus people, you can make up your mind to that. There's always an ugly crowd going along with 'em, and sometimes a little ahead. It's been some of 'em, I'm sure; very well, very well, I'll go right out and investigate."

He told Fred it was necessary he should go along with him, and the boy did so, being informed that he would be permitted to attend the show in the afternoon.

The fussy constable made the investigation, assisted by the sisters, who had become much calmer, and by Fred, who, it will be understood, was an important witness.

The officer went through and through the house, examining the floor and chairs and windows and furniture for marks that might help him in ferreting out the guilty parties. He looked very wise, and, when he was done, said he had his own theory, and he was more

convinced than ever that the two burglars were attaches of Bandman's menagerie and circus.

"Purely as a matter of business," said he, "I'll attend the performances this afternoon and evening; I don't believe in circuses, but an officer of the law must sometimes go where his inclination doesn't lead him. Wouldn't you ladies like to attend the show?"

The sisters were quite shocked at the invitation, and said that nothing could induce them to go to such an exhibition, when they never attended one in all their lives.

"In the meantime," added the bustling officer, "I suggest that you offer a reward for the recovery of the goods."

"The suggestion is a good one," said Aunt Annie," for I do not believe we shall ever get back the silverware unless we make it an inducement for everybody to hunt for it."

After some further words it was agreed that the constable should have a hundred posters printed, offering a reward for the recovery of the stolen property, nothing being said about the capture and conviction of the thieves.

Nor would the conscientious ladies consent to make any offer that could be accepted by the thieves themselves, by which they could claim protection against prosecution.

They would rather bear their irreparable loss than consent to compound crime.

"I know Mr. Carter, a very skillful detective in New

York," said Archie Jackson, as he prepared to go, "and I will send for him. He's the sharpest man I ever saw, and if the property can be found, he's the one to do it."

The confidence of the officer gave the ladies much hope, and they resumed their duties in their household, as they had done so many times for years past.

As the afternoon approached, the crowds began streaming into Tottenville, and the sight was a stirring one, with the band of music inside, the shouts of the peddlers on the outside, and the general confusion and expectancy on the part of all.

The doors were open early, for, as is always the case, the multitude were ahead of time, and were clamoring for admission.

As may be supposed, the boys were among the earliest, and the little fellows who had suffered at the hands of the cruel Bud Heyland forgot all their miseries in the delight of the entertainment.

On this special occasion Fred had rolled down his trousers and wore a pair of shoes, although most of his playmates preferred no covering at all for their brown, expanding feet.

The "performance," as the circus portion was called, did not begin until two o'clock, so that more than an hour was at the disposal of the visitors in which to inspect the animals.

These were found to be much less awe-inspiring than they were pictured on the flaming posters and on the sides of their cages. The hippopotamus, which was represented as crushing a large boat, containing several

men, in his jaws, was taken for a small, queer-looking pig, as it was partly seen in the tank, while the grizzly bear, the "Monarch of the Western Wilds," who had slain any number of men before capture, did not look any more formidable than a common dog.

The chief interest of Fred and two or three of his young friends centered around the cage containing the Numidian lion. He was of pretty fair size, looked very fierce, and strode majestically back and forth in his narrow quarters, now and then giving vent to a cavernous growl, which, although not very pleasant to hear, was not so appalling by any means as some travelers declare it to be.

Most of the boys soon went to the cage of monkeys, whose funny antics kept them in a continual roar; but Fred and Joe Hunt, who were about the same age, seemed never to tire of watching the king of beasts.

"Come, move on there; you've been gaping long enough, and it's time other folks had a chance."

It was Bud Heyland, who had yielded his position on the outside for a few minutes to one of the men, and had come in to look around. He raised his whip in a threatening manner, but did not let it descend.

"I'm not in anybody's way," replied the indignant Fred, "and I'll stand here as long as I want to."

"You will, eh? I'll show you!"

This time the bully drew back his whip with the intention of striking, but before he could do so Archie Jackson, standing near, called out:

"You touch him if you dare!"

Bud turned toward the constable, who stood at his elbow, with flashing eyes, and demanded:

"What's the matter with you?"

"That boy isn't doing any harm, and if you touch him I'll take you by the collar and lock you up where you'll stay a while after this miserable show has gone."

Bud knew the officer and held him in more fear than any one else in the community, but he growled:

"This boy crawled under the tent, and he's no business in here."

"That's a falsehood, for I saw him buy his ticket. Come now, young man, I *know something about last night's nefarious proceedings.*"

It would be hard to describe the significance with which these words were spoken, but it may be said that no one could have made them more impressive than did the fiery constable, who said them over a second time, and then, shaking his head very knowingly, walked away.

It may have been that Bud Heyland was such a bad boy that his conscience accused him at all times, but Fred Sheldon was certain he saw the red face grow more crimson under the words of the hot-tempered constable.

"Can it be Bud knows anything about last night?" Fred asked himself, attentively watching the movements of Bud, who affected to be interested in something going on a rod or two distant.

He walked rapidly thither, but was gone only a short while when he came back scowling at Fred, who looked at him in an inquiring way.

"What are you staring at me so for?" asked Bud, half raising his hand as if he wanted to strike, but was afraid to do so.

Fred now did something which bordered on insolence, though the party of the other part deserved no consideration therefor. The little fellow looked steadily in the red, inflamed face, and with that peculiar grin that means so much in a boy, said in a low, confidential voice:

"Bud, how about last night?"

Young Sheldon had no warrant to assume that Bud Heyland knew anything of the robbery, and he was only following up the hint given by Archie Jackson himself.

This may have been the reason that Fred fancied he could detect a resemblance—very slight though it was—between the voice of Bud Heyland and that of the tramp who sat at the table in the old brick house, and who, beyond question, had a false beard on.

The young man with the whip in his hand simply looked back at the handsome countenance before him, and without any appearance of emotion, asked in turn:

"What are you talking about?"

Fred continued to look and smile, until suddenly Bud lost all self-command and whirled his whip over his head.

As he did so, the lash flew through the bars of the cage and struck the Numidian lion a sharp, stinging blow on the nose.

He gave a growl of anger, and half-rearing on his

hind feet, made a furious clawing and clutching with both paws. The end of the lash seemed to have hit him in the eye, for he was furious for a minute.

Bud Heyland knew what the sounds behind him meant, and instead of striking the young lad whom he detested so much, he turned about in the hope of soothing the enraged lion.

He spoke kindly to the beast, and failing to produce any effect, was about to call one of the men to bring some meat, but at that instant every one near at hand was startled by a crashing, grinding sound, and the cage was seen to sway as if on the point of turning over.

Then, before any one could comprehend fully what had occurred, a huge form was seen to bound through the air in front of the cage, landing directly among the terrified group, who stood spell-bound, scarcely realizing their fearful peril.

"The lion is loose! the lion is loose!" was the next cry that rang through the enclosure.

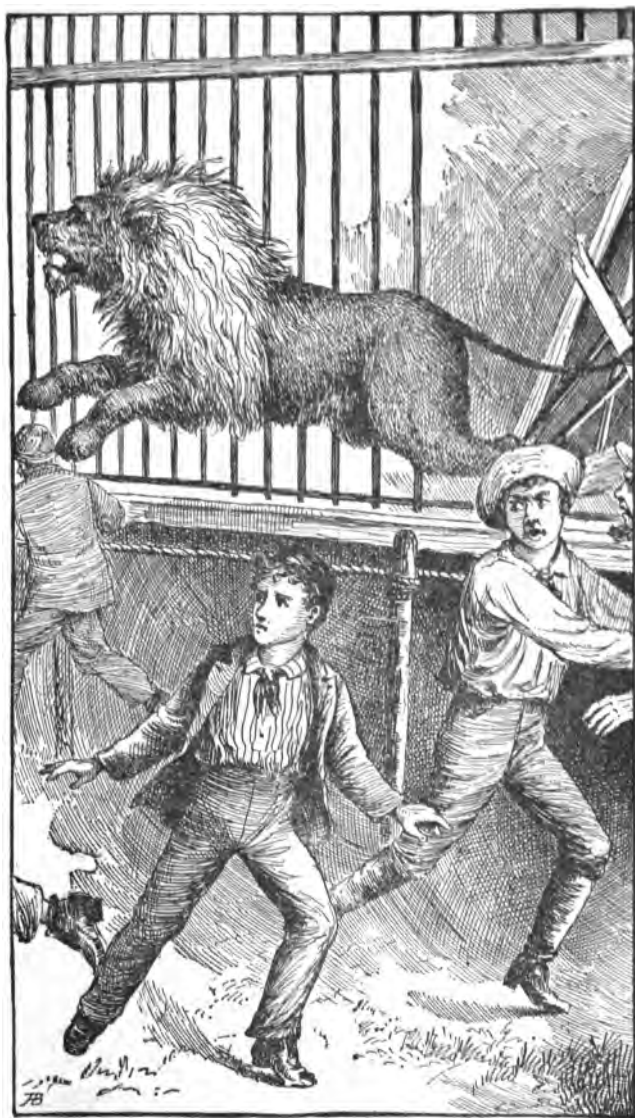
CHAPTER VIII.

A DAY OF EXCITEMENT IN TOTTEENVILLE.

IF ANY of our readers were ever so unfortunate as to be in the neighborhood of a menagerie of animals when one of the fiercest has broken loose he can form some idea of the confusion, terror and consternation caused by the escape of the lion from his cage.

Strong men rushed headlong over each other; parents caught up their children and struggled desperately to get as far as possible from the dreadful beast; the other animals uttered fierce growls and cries; women and children screamed and fainted; brave escorts deserted young ladies, leaving them to look out for themselves, while they joined in the frantic struggle for life; some crawled under the wagons; others clambered upon the top, and one man, original even in his panic, scrambled into the cage just vacated by the lion, intending to do his utmost to keep the rightful owner from getting back again.

Could any one have looked upon the exciting scene, and preserved his self-possession, he would have observed a burly boy climbing desperately up the center pole, never pausing until he reached the point where the heavy ropes of the canvas converged, when he stopped panting, and looked down on what was passing beneath him.



**"The lion sprang through the air among the terrified group."
—(See page 71.)**

The name of that young man was Bud Heyland.

Among the multitude that swarmed through the entrance to the tent, which was choked until strong men fought savagely to beat back the mad tide, were three boys who got outside safely on their feet, and, drawing in their breath, broke into a blind but very earnest run that was intended to take them as far as possible from the dangerous spot.

They were Jimmy Emery, Joe Hunt and Fred Sheldon.

The last-named saw the lion make a tremendous bound, which landed him almost at his feet, and Fred was sure it was all over with him; but he did not stand still and be devoured, but plunged in among the struggling mass and reached the exterior of the tent without a scratch.

High above the din and tumult rose the shout of the principal showman:

“Don’t kill the lion! Don’t kill the lion!”

It was hard to see the necessity for this cry, inasmuch as the danger seemed to be altogether the other way, but the one who uttered the useless words was evidently afraid some of the people would begin shooting at the beast, which was altogether too valuable to lose, if there was any way of avoiding it.

It may be, too, that he believed a general fusillade, when the confusion was so great, would be more perilous to the people than to the lion.

There is reason in the belief that, as some scientists claim, there is a sense of humor which sometimes comes

to the surface in certain animals, and the action of the Numidian lion when he broke out tended to confirm such a statement.

He seemed to forget all about the sharp cut he had received across the nose and eyes the moment he was clear of his cage and to enjoy the hubbub he created.

Had he chosen he could have lacerated and killed a score of children within his reach, but instead of doing so he jumped at the terrified crowd, striking them pretty hard blows with his fore paws, then wheeling about and making for another group, who were literally driven out of their senses by the sight of the brute coming toward them.

One young gentleman who was with a lady left her without a word, and, catching sight of a small ladder, placed it hastily against the center pole and ran rapidly up the rounds, but the ladder itself stood so nearly perpendicular that when he reached the top and looked around to see whether the king of beasts was following him, it tipped backward, and he fell directly upon the shoulders of the lion, rolling off and turning a back somersault, where he lay kicking with might and main, and shouting to everybody to come and take him away.

The brute paid no attention to him except to act in a confused manner for a minute or two, when he darted straight across the ring to an open space in the wall of the tent, made by some men who had cut it with their knives. The next moment he was on the outside.

The bewilderment and consternation seemed to increase every minute, and did not abate when the lion

was seen to be galloping up the road toward a forest, in which he disappeared.

A number of the show people ran after him, shouting and calling continually to others to keep out of his way and not to kill him.

The beast had entered a track of dense woodland, covering fully a dozen acres, and abounding with undergrowth, where it was probable he could hide himself for days from his would-be captors.

The incident broke up the exhibition for the afternoon, although it was announced that it would go on again as usual in the evening, when something like self-possession came back to the vast swarm of people scattered through the village and over the grounds, it was found that although a number had been severely bruised and trampled upon, no one was seriously injured, and what was the strangest fact of all, no one could be found who had suffered any hurt from the lion.

This was unaccountable to nearly every one, though the explanation, or partial one, at least, appeared within the succeeding few days.

Had the lion been able to understand the peril into which he entered by this freak of his it may be safely said that he would not have left his cage, for no sooner had the community a chance to draw breath and realize the situation than they resolved that it would never do to allow such a ferocious animal to remain at large.

"Why, he can hide in the woods there and sally out and kill a half dozen at a time, just as they do in their native country," said Archie Jackson, discussing the matter in the village store.

"Yes," assented a neighbor; "the lion is the awfulest kind of a creature, which is why they call him the king of beasts. In Brazil and Italy, where they run wild, they're worse than—than—than a—that is—than a steam b'iler explosion."

"We must organize," added the constable, compressing his thin lips; "self-protection demands it."

"I think we had better call on the Governor to bring out the military, and to keep up the hunt until he is exterminated."

"No need of calling on the military, so long as the civil law is sufficient," insisted Archie. "A half-dozen of us, well armed, will be able to smoke him out."

"Will you j'ine?" asked one of the neighbors.

The constable cleared his throat before saying:

"I've some important business on my hands that'll keep me pretty busy for a few days. If you will wait till that is over, it will give me pleasure—ahem!—to j'ine you."

"By that time there won't be any of us left to j'ine," said the neighbor with a contemptuous sniff. "It looks very much, Archie, as though you were trying to get out of it."

The constable grew red in the face at the general smile this caused, and said, in his most impressive manner:

"Gentlemen, I'll go with you in search of the lion; more than that, gentlemen and fellow-citizens, I'll lead you."

"That's business; you ain't such a big coward as people say you are."

“Who says I’m a coward—show him to me——”

At this moment one of the young men attached to the menagerie and circus entered, and when all became still said:

“Gentlemen, my name is Jacob Kincade, and I’m the keeper of the lion which broke out to-day and is off somewhere in the woods. He is a very valuable animal to us, we having imported him directly from the Bushman country, at a great expense. His being at large has created a great excitement, as was to be expected, but we don’t want him killed.”

“Of course not,” said Archie Jackson, who echoed the sentiment of his neighbors, as he added, “You prefer that he should go raging ’round the country and chaw us all up instead. My friend, that little scheme won’t work; we’re just on the point of organizing an exploring expedition to shoot the lion. Our duty to our wives and families demands that we should extirpate the scourge. Yes, sir,” added Archie, rising from his chair and gesticulating like an orator, “as patriots we are bound to prevent any foreign monsters, especially them as are worshiped by the red-coats, to squat on our soil and murder our citizens. The glorious American eagle——”

“One minute,” interrupted Mr. Kincade, with a wave of his hand. “It isn’t the eagle, but the lion we are considering. The menagerie, having made engagements so far ahead, must show in Lumberton to-morrow evening, but two of us will stay behind to arrange for his recapture. Bud Heyland, whose home is in this vicinity,

and myself would like to employ a dozen of you to assist. You will be well paid therefor, and whoever secures him, without harm, will receive a reward of a hundred dollars."

While these important words were being uttered, Archie Jackson remained standing on the floor, facing the speaker, with his hand still raised, as if he intended resuming his patriotic speech at the point where it had been broken in upon.

But when the showman stopped Archie stood staring at him with mouth open, hand raised and silent tongue.

"Go on," suggested one at his elbow.

But the constable let his arm fall against his side, and said:

"I had a good thing about the emblem of British tyranny, but he put me out. Will give a hundred dollars, eh? That's another matter altogether. But I say, Mr. Kincade, how shall we go to work to capture a lion? That sort of game ain't abundant in these parts, and I don't think there's any one here that's ever hunted 'em."

Old Mr. Scrapton, who was known to be the teller of the most amazing stories ever heard in the neighborhood, opened his mouth to relate how he had lassoed lions forty years before, when he was hunting on the plains of Texas, but he restrained himself. He thought it best to wait till this particular beast had been disposed of and was out of the neighborhood.

"I may say, gentlemen," added the showman, with a peculiar smile, "that this lion is not so savage and dan-

gerous as most people think. You will call to mind, although he broke loose in the afternoon, when the tent was crowded with people, and when he had every opportunity he could wish, yet he did not hurt any one."

"That is a very remarkable circumstance," said the constable, in a low voice, heard by all.

"I am warranted, therefore," added Mr. Kincade, "in saying that there is no cause for such extreme fright on your part. You should fix some sort of cage and bait it with meat. Then watch, and when he goes in spring the trap, and there he is."

"Yes, but will he stay there?"

"If the trap is strong enough."

"How would it do to lasso him?"

"If you are skilled in throwing the lasso and can fling several nooses over his head simultaneously from different directions. By that I mean if three or four of you can lasso him at the same instant, from different directions, so he will be held fast, why the scheme will work splendidly."

All eyes turned toward old Mr. Scrapton, who cleared his throat, threw one leg over the other and looked very wise.

It was known that he had a long buffalo thong looped and hanging over his fire-place at home, with which, he had often told, he used to lasso wild horses in the Southwest.

When the old gentleman saw the general interest he had awakened, he nodded his head patronizingly and said:

"Yes, boys, I'll go with you and show you how the thing is done."

The important conversation, of which we have given a part, took place in the principal store in Totteville late on the evening succeeding the escape of the lion and after the performance was over.

Mr. Kincade, by virtue of his superior experience with wild animals, gave the men a great many good points and awakened such an ambition in them to capture the beast that he was quite hopeful of his being retaken in a short time.

It was understood that if the lion was injured in any way not a penny's reward would be paid, and a careful observer of matters would have thought there was reason to fear the neighbors were placing themselves in great personal peril, through their anxiety to take the king of beasts alive and unharmed.

On the morrow, when the children wended their way to the old stone school-house again, they stopped to look at Archie Jackson, who was busy tearing down the huge posters of the menagerie and circus, preparatory to tacking up some others which he had brought with him and held under his arm.

The constable dipped into several professions. He sometimes dug wells and helped to move houses for his neighbors. Beside this, he was known as the auctioneer of the neighborhood, and tacked up the announcement posters for himself.

As soon as he had cleared a space, he posted the following, printed in large, black letters;

ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

The above reward will be paid for the capture of the lion which escaped from Bandman's great menagerie and circus on Tuesday the twenty-first instant. Nothing will be paid if the animal is injured in any manner. The undersigned will be at the Tottenville Hotel for a few days, and will hand the reward named to any one who will secure the lion so that he can be returned to his cage.

JACOB KINCADE.

Directly beneath this paper was placed a second one, and it seemed a curious coincident that it also was the announcement of a reward.

FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.

The above reward will be paid for the recovery of the silver tea-service stolen from the residence of the Misses Perkinpine on the night of the twentieth instant. A liberal price will be given for anything in the way of information which may lead to the recovery of the property or the detection of the thieves.

Attached to the last was a minute description of the various articles stolen, and the information that any one who wished further particulars could receive them by communicating with Archibald Jackson, constable, in Tottenville.

The menagerie and circus had departed, but the excitement which it left behind was probably greater and more intense than that which preceded its arrival.

Its coming was announced by a daring robbery, and when it went the most terrible animal in its "colossal and unparalleled collection" remained to prowl through the woods and feast upon the men, women, boys and

girls of the neighborhood, to say nothing of the cows, oxen, sheep, lambs and pigs with which it was to be supposed the king of beasts would amuse himself when he desired a little recreation that should remind him of his native, far-away country.

Around these posters were gathered the same trio which we pictured on the opening of our story.

"I tell you I'd like to catch that lion," said Jimmy Emery, smacking his lips over the prospect; "but I don't see how it can be done."

"Why couldn't we coax him into the school-house this afternoon after all the girls and boys are gone?" asked Joe Hunt; "it's so low and flat he would take it for his den, that is, if we kill a calf and lay it inside the door."

"But Mr. McCurtis stays an hour after school to set copies," said Fred Sheldon.

Joe Hunt scratched his arms, which still felt the sting of the blows for his failure in his lessons, and said:

"That's one reason why I am so anxious to get the lion in there."

"Well, younkers, I s'pose you're going to earn both of them rewards?"

It was Bud Heyland who uttered these words, as he halted among the boys, who were rather shy of him.

Bud had his trousers tucked in the top of his boots, his sombrero and blue shirt on, his rank brier-wood pipe in his mouth, and the whip, whose lash looked like a long, coiling black snake, in his hand.

His face was red as usual, with blotches on his nose

and cheeks, such as must have been caused by dissipation. He was ugly by nature, and had the neighborhood been given the choice between having him and the lion as a pest it may be safely said that Bud would not have been the choice of all.

"I don't think there's much chance for us," said Fred Sheldon, quietly edging away from the bully; "for I don't see how we are to catch and hold him."

"It would not do for him to see you," said Bud, taking his pipe from his mouth and grinning at Fred.

"Why not?"

"He's so fond of calves he'd be sure to go for you."

"That's why he tried so hard to get at you, I s'pose, when you climbed the tent pole and was so scared you've been pale ever since."

Bud was angered by this remark, which caused a general laugh, and he raised his whip, but just then he saw the teacher, Mr. McCurtis, close at hand, and he refrained. Although large and strong, like all bullies, he was a coward, and could not forget the severe drubbing received from this severe pedagogue, "all of ye olden times."

He walked sullenly away, resolved to punish the impudent Fred Sheldon before he left the neighborhood, while the ringing of the cracked bell a minute or two later drew the boys and girls to the building and the studies of the day were begun.

Young Fred Sheldon was the brightest and best boy in school, and he got through his lessons with his usual facility, but it may be said that his thoughts were anywhere but in the school-room.

Indeed, there was plenty to rack his brain over, for during the few minutes when Bud Heyland stood talking to the boys before school Fred was impressed more than ever with the fact that his voice resembled that of the tramp who had been entertained by the Misses Perkinpine a couple of nights before.

"I s'pose he tried to make his voice sound different," thought Fred, "but he didn't remember it all the time. Bud's voice is coarser than it used to be, which I s'pose is because it's changing, but every once in awhile it sounded just like it did a few minutes ago.

"Then it seems to me," added our hero, pursuing the same train of perplexing thought, "that the voice of the other man—the one that come on to me in the lane—was like somebody I've heard, but I can't think who the person can be."

Fred took out his new knife and looked at it in a furtive way. When he had admired it a few minutes he fixed his eyes on the three letters cut in the brass piece.

"They're 'N. H. H.,'" he said, "as sure as I live; but 'N. H. H.' don't stand for Bud Heyland, though the last name is the same. If that was Bud who stole the silver then he must have dropped the knife on the floor, though I don't see how he could do it without knowing it. I s'pose he stole the knife from some one else."

The boy had not shown his prize to any of his playmates, having thought it best to keep it out of sight. He could not help believing that Bud Heyland had something to do with the robbery, but it was difficult to

think of any way by which the offense could be proven against him.

"He'll deny it, of course, and even Aunt Annie and Lizzie will declare that it wasn't him that sat at the table the other night and eat enough for a half-dozen men, or as much as I wanted, anyway. He's such a mean, ugly boy that I wish I could prove it on him—that is, if he did it."

That day Fred received word from his mother that she would not return for several days, and he was directed to look after the house, while he was permitted to sleep at the old brick mansion if he chose.

Accordingly Fred saw that all his chores were properly done after he reached home that afternoon, when he started for the home of the maiden ladies, where he was more than welcome.

The boy followed the same course he took two nights before, and his thoughts were so occupied that he went along at times almost instinctively, as may be said.

"Gracious," he muttered, "but if I could find that silver for them—she don't say anything about the money that was taken—that would be an awful big reward. Five hundred dollars! It would more than pay the mortgage on our place. Then that one hundred dollars for the lion—gracious alive!" gasped Fred, stopping short and looking around in dismay. "I wonder where that lion is. He's been loose twenty-four hours, and I should like to know how many people he has killed. I heard he was seen up among the hills this morning, and eat a whole family and a team of horses, but I think maybe there's some mistake about it.

"I wonder why he didn't kill somebody yesterday when he had such a good chance. He jumped right down in front of me, and I just gave up, and wished I was a better boy before I should go and leave mother alone; but he didn't pay any attention to me, nor anybody else, but he's a terrible creature, for all that."

Now that Fred's thoughts were turned toward the beast that was prowling somewhere in the neighborhood, he could think of nothing else. There was the fact that this peril was a present one, which drove all thoughts of Bud Heyland and the robbery from the mind of the boy.

The rustling wind, the murmur of the woods, and the soft, hollow roar of the distant river were all suggestive of the dreaded lion, and Fred found himself walking on tip-toe and peering forward in the gloom, often stopping and looking behind and around, and fancying he caught an outline of the crouching beast.

But at last he reached the short lane and began moving with a rapid and confident step. The moon was shining a little more brightly than when he went over the ground before, and here and there the rays found their way between the poplars and served to light the road in front.

"I guess he is asleep in the woods and will keep out of sight till he's found——"

The heart of Fred Sheldon rose in his throat, and, as he stopped short, it seemed that his hair rose on end.

And well it might, for there, directly in the road before him, where the moon's rays shot through the branches, the unmistakable figure of the dreaded lion suddenly appeared.

CHAPTER IX.

SEVERAL MISHAPS.

ON THIS same eventful evening, Archie Jackson, the constable of Tottenville, started from the residence of the Misses Perkinpine for his own house in the village.

He had been out to make some inquiries of the ladies, for it will be remembered that he had two very important matters on hand—the detection of the robbers who had taken the property of the sisters and the leadership of the party who were to recapture the lion.

At the close of the day, as he moved off toward the village, some time before the arrival of Fred Sheldon, he could not console himself with the knowledge that anything like real progress had been made in either case.

“I’ve sent for that New York detective, Carter, to come down at once, and he ought to be here, but I haven’t seen anything of him. Like enough he’s off somewhere and won’t be heard from for a week. I don’t know as I care, for I begin to feel as though I can work out this nefarious proceeding myself.

“Then the lion. Well, I can’t say that I desire to go hunting for that sort of game, for I never studied their habits much, but as this cretur’ doesn’t seem to be very

ferocious we ought to be able to run him in. I've organized the company, and Scampton says he'll bring out his lasso and show two or three of us how to fling the thing, so we can all neck him at the same time.

"If I can work up this matter and the other," continued the constable, who was "counting his chickens before they were hatched," "I shall make a nice little fee. I'm sure the lion will stay in the woods till he's pretty hungry. All the wild reports we've heard to-day have nothing in them. Nobody has seen him since he took to the forest yesterday afternoon, and what's more, nobody will——"

And just then came the greatest shock of Archie Jackson's life.

He was walking along the road toward Tottenville, and had reached a place where a row of trees overhung the path. He had taken a different route home from that pursued by Fred Sheldon, and was in quite a comfortable frame of mind, as the remarks quoted will show, when he gave a gasp of fright, for there, at the side of the path, he was sure he saw the lion himself sitting on his haunches and waiting for him to come within reach of his frightful claws and teeth.

The constable did not observe him until he was within arm's length, as may be said, and then the poor fellow was transfixed. He stood a minute or so, doing nothing but breathe and staring at the monster.

The lion seemed to comprehend that he was master of the situation, for he quietly remained sitting on his haunches, no doubt waiting for his victim to prepare for his inevitable fate.

Finally, Archie began to experience something like a reaction, and he asked himself whether he was to perish thus miserably, or was there not some hope, no matter how desperate, for him.

Of course he had no gun, but he generally carried a loaded revolver, for his profession often demanded the display of such a weapon; but to his dismay, when he softly reached his right hand back to his hip to draw it, he recalled that he had cleaned it that afternoon, and left it lying on his stand at home.

The situation was enough to make one despair, and for an instant after the discovery the officer felt such a weakness in the knees that it was all he could do to keep from sinking to the ground in a perfect collapse; but he speedily rallied, and determined on one great effort for life.

"I will strike him with my fist—that will knock him over—and then run for a tree."

This was his resolve. Archie could deliver a powerful blow, and, believing the lion would not wait any longer, he drew back his clenched hand and aimed for the forehead directly between the eyes.

He measured the distance correctly, but the instant the blow landed he felt he had made a mistake; it was not the runaway lion which he had struck, but the stump of an old tree.

It is hardly necessary to say that the constable suffered more than did the stump, and for a minute or two he was sure he had fractured the bones of his hand, so great was the pain. He danced about on one foot,

shaking the bruised member and bewailing the stupidity that led him to make such a grievous error.

"That beats anything I ever knowed in all my life," he exclaimed, "and how glad I am that nobody else knows it; if the folks ever hear of it, they will plague me forever and——"

"Halloo, Archie, what's the matter?"

The cold chills ran down the officer's back as he heard this hail, and suppressing all expression of pain, he shoved his hands into his pockets and looked quickly around.

In the dim moonlight he saw old man Scrapton and two neighbors, Vincent and Emery, fathers respectively of two playmates of Fred Sheldon.

Each carried a coil of long, strong rope in his right hand and seemed to be considerably excited over something.

"We're after the lion," said Mr. Scrapton; "have you seen him?"

"No, I don't think he's anywhere around here."

"I've had Vincent and Emery out in the meadow nearly all day, practicing throwing the lasso, and they've got the hang of it exactly. Emery can fling the noose over the horns of a cow a dozen yards away and never miss, while Vincent, by way of experiment, dropped the noose over the shoulders of his wife at a greater distance."

"Yes," said Mr. Vincent, "but I don't regard that as much of a success. Mrs. Vincent objected, and before I could let go of my end of the lasso, she drawed me to her and—well, I'd prefer to talk of something else."

The constable laughed and said:

"It's a good thing to practice a little beforehand, when you are going into such a dangerous business as this."

"I suppose that's the reason you've been hammering that white oak stump," suggested Mr. Scrapton, with a chuckle.

Archie Jackson saw he was caught, and begged his friends to say nothing about it, as he had already suffered as much in spirit as body.

"But do you expect to find the lion to-night?" he asked, with unaffected interest.

"Yes, we know just where to look for him," said Mr. Scrapton; "he stayed in the woods all day, but just as the sun was setting I caught sight of him along the edge of the fence, and he isn't far from there this very minute."

"Do you want me to go with you?"

"Certainly."

"But I have no weapon."

"All the better; I made each leave his gun and pistols at home, for they'd be so scared at the first sight of the cretur' they'd fire before they knowed it and spoil everything. Like the boys at Ticonderoga, if their guns ain't loaded, they can't shoot 'em."

"But I don't see what help I can give you, as I haven't got a rope; and even if I had, I wouldn't know how to use it."

"Come along, any way; we'll feel safer if we have another with us."

It cannot be said that the constable was very enthusiastic, for there was something in the idea of hunting the king of beasts without firearms which was as terrifying as it was grotesque.

However, he could not refuse, and the four started down the road and across the field, in the direction of the large tract of forest in which it was known the lion had taken refuge when he broke from his cage the day before.

A walk of something like a third of a mile took the party to the edge of the wood, where they stopped and held a consultation in whispers.

None of them were so brave as they seemed a short time before, and all secretly wished they were safe at home.

"I don't see how you can expect to find him by hunting in the night time, when you have made no preparation," said Archie Jackson, strongly impressed with the absurdity of the whole business.

"But I have made preparation," answered Scampton, in the same guarded undertone.

"How?"

"I killed a pig and threw him over the fence yonder by that pile of rocks--good heavens!"

At the moment of pointing his finger to indicate the spot, all heard a low cavernous growl, which sent a shiver of affright from head to foot.

They were about to break into a run, when the constable said:

"If you start, he will be after us; let's stand our ground."

"Certainly," assented Mr. Vincent, through his chattering teeth.

"Certainly, certainly," added his neighbor, in the same quaking voice.

Toning down their extreme terror as best they could, the four frightened friends strained their eyes to catch a sight of the animal.

"He's there," said Scrapton, fingering his lasso in a way which showed he was very eager to hurl it.

"Where?"

"Right behind the fence; I see him; he's crouching down and eating the carcass of the pig."

"When he gets through with that he will come for us."

"Like enough—but that will be all right," said the old gentleman, who really showed more self-possession than any of the others; "for it will give us just the chance we want."

"How so?"

"When he comes over the fence we'll sort of scatter and throw our lassoes together; then each will pull with all his might and main."

"But," said Mr. Vincent, "s'posing we pull his head off, we won't get any of the reward."

"We can't pull hard enough to do that, but if we hold on we'll keep him fast, so he can't move any way at all, and bime-by he'll get so tired that he'll give up, and we'll have him, certain sure."

"That is, if he don't happen to have us," said Mr. Jackson. "As I haven't got any rope, s'pose I climb

over the fence and scare him up so he will come toward you."

The idea seemed to be a good one, as the others looked at it, but when the constable moved off to carry out his proposition they thought he was making altogether too extended a circuit, and that it would be a long while before he would succeed in his undertaking.

Archie finally vanished in the gloom, and climbing over the fence into the woods moved a short distance toward the spot where the animal lay, when he paused.

"The man who goes to hunt a wild lion with nothing but a jack-knife with both blades broke out is a natural-born idiot, which his name isn't Archie Jackson. I've business elsewhere."

And thereupon he deliberately turned about and started homeward by a circuitous route.

Meanwhile old Mr. Scrapton and Vincent and Emery stood trembling and waiting for the appearance of the lion, which, judging from the sounds that reached their ears, was busy crunching the bones of the young porker that had been slain for his special benefit.

They didn't know whether to stay where they were or to break into a run. The danger seemed great, but the reward was so tempting that they held their ground.

"He may start to run away," weakly suggested Mr. Vincent.

"I don't think so, now that he's tasted blood, but if he does," said the leader of the party, "we must follow."

"But he can run faster than we——"

"There he comes!"

In the darkness they saw the faintly-outlined figure of an animal clambering over the fence, with growls and mutterings, and hardly conscious of what they were doing, the three men immediately separated several yards from each other and nervously clutched their ropes, ready to fling them the instant the opportunity presented itself.

"There he comes!" called out Mr. Scrapton again; "throw your lassoes!"

At the same instant the three coils of rope whizzed through the air as a dark figure was seen moving in a direction which promised to bring him to a point equidistant from all.

Mr. Vincent was too enthusiastic in throwing his noose, for it went beyond the animal and settled around the neck of the astonished Mr. Emery, who thought the lion had caught him in his embrace, thrown as he was off his feet and pulled fiercely over the ground by the thrower.

Mr. Emery missed his mark altogether, although Mr. Scrapton had to dodge his head to escape the encircling coil.

The old gentleman would have lassoed the animal had he not discovered at the very instant the noose left his hand that it was his own mastiff, Towser, that they were seeking to capture instead of a runaway lion.

CHAPTER X.**A BRAVE ACT.**

MEANWHILE Fred Sheldon had become involved in anything but a pleasant experience.

There might be mistakes ludicrous and otherwise in the case of others, but when he saw the animal in the lane before him, as revealed by the rays of the moon, there was no error.

It was the identical lion that had escaped from the menagerie the day previous, and the beast must have noted the presence of the terrified lad, who stopped such a short distance from him.

Master Fred was so transfixed that he did not stir for a few seconds, and then it seemed to him that the best thing he could do was to turn about and run, and yell with might and main, just as he did some weeks before when he stepped into a yellow-jackets' nest.

It is hard to understand how the yelling helps a boy when caught in such a dilemma, but we know from experience that it is easier to screech at the top of one's voice, as you strike at the insects that settle about your head, than it is to concentrate all your powers in the single act of running.

Almost unconsciously, Fred began stepping backward, keeping his gaze fixed upon the lion as he did so. If

the latter was aware of the stratagem, which is sometimes used with advantage by the African hunter, he did not immediately seek to thwart it, but continued facing him, and occasionally swaying his tail, accompanied by low, thunderous growls.

The boys of the school had learned a great deal of natural history within the last day or two, and Fred had read about the king of beasts. He knew that a lion could crouch on his belly, and, with one prodigious bound, pass over the intervening space.

The lad was afraid the one before him meant to act according to the instincts of his nature, and he retreated more rapidly, until all at once he whirled about and ran for dear life, directly toward the highway.

He did not shout, though, if he had seen any other person, he would have called for help; but, when he reached the road, he cast a glance over his shoulder, expecting to feel the horrible claws at the same instant.

The lion was invisible. Fred could scarcely believe his eyes; but such was the fact.

"I don't understand him," was the conclusion of the boy, who kept moving further away, scarcely daring to believe in his own escape even for a few brief minutes.

Fred had been too thoroughly scared to wish to meet the lion again, but he wanted to get back to the house that the Misses Perkinpine could be told of the new danger which threatened them.

"I think they'll be more likely to believe me than right before last," said the lad to himself.

But nothing could tempt him to venture along the lane again after such an experience.

It was easy enough to reach the house by a long detour, but the half belief that the lion was lurking in the vicinity made the effort anything but assuring.

However, Fred Sheldon thought it his duty to let his good friends know the new peril to which they were subject, in the event of venturing out of doors.

So slow and stealthy was his next approach to the building that nearly an hour passed before he found himself in the small yard surrounding the house; but, when once there, he hastened to the front door and gave such a resounding knock with the old-fashioned brass knocker that it could have been heard a long distance away, on the still summer night.

It seemed a good while to Fred before the bolt was withdrawn, and Aunt Annie appeared in her cap and spectacles.

"Oh, it's you, Fred, is it?" she exclaimed with pleasure, when she recognized the young man who was so welcome at all times. "You are so late that we had given you up, and were going to retire."

"I started early enough, but it seems to me as if every sort of awful thing is after us," replied Fred, as he hastily followed the lady into the dining-room, where the sisters began preparing the meal for which the visitor, like all urchins of his age, was ready at any time.

"What's the matter now, Freddy?" asked Aunt Lizzie.

"Why, you had a tramp after you night before last, and now you've got a big, roaring lion."

"A what?" asked the two in amazement, for they had not heard a syllable of the exciting incident of the day before.

"Why, there's a lion that broke out of the menagerie yesterday, and they haven't been able to catch him yet."

"Land sakes alive!" gasped Aunt Annie, sinking into a chair and raising her hands, "what is the world coming to?"

Aunt Lizzie sat down more deliberately, but her pale face and amazed look showed she was no less agitated.

Fred helped himself to some more of the luscious shortcake and golden butter and preserves, and feeling the importance of his position told the story with which our readers are familiar, though it must be confessed the lad exaggerated somewhat, as perhaps was slightly excusable under the circumstances.

Still it was not right for him to describe the lion as of the size of an ordinary elephant, unless he referred to the baby elephant, which had never been seen in this country at that time.

Nor should he have pictured his run down the lane, with the beast behind him all the way, snapping at his head, while Fred only saved himself by his dexterity in dodging him.

There was scarcely any excuse for such hyperbole, though the narrative was implicitly believed by the ladies, who felt they were in greater danger than if a score of burglarious tramps were planning to rob them.

"They've offered one hundred dollars to any one who catches the lion without hurting him." added Fred, as

well as he could speak with his mouth filled with spongy gingerbread.

"A hundred dollars!" exclaimed Aunt Lizzie; "why, he'll kill anybody who goes near him. If I were a man I wouldn't try to capture him for a million dollars."

"I'm going to try to catch him," said Fred, in his off-hand fashion, as though it was a small matter, and then, swallowing enough of the sweet food to allow him to speak more plainly, he added:

"Lions ain't of much account when you get used to 'em; I'm beginning to feel as though I'm going to make that hundred dollars."

But the good ladies could not accept this statement as an earnest one, and they chided their youthful visitor for talking so at random. Fred thought it best not to insist, and finished his meal without any further declarations of what he intended to do.

"They've left two persons behind to look after the lion," he said; "one is named Kincade and the other is Bud Heyland, you know him—the son of Michael, your hired man."

"Yes; he called here to-day."

"He did. What for?"

"Oh, nothing in particular; he said he heard we had had our silverware stolen, and he wanted to tell us how sorry he felt and to ask whether we had any suspicion of who took it."

"He did, eh?" said Fred, half to himself, with a belief that he understood the real cause of that call.

"I think Bud is getting to be a much better boy

than he used to be," added Aunt Annie; "he was real sorry for us, and talked real nice. He said he expected to be at home for two or three days, though he didn't tell us what for, and he would drop in to see us."

Master Sheldon made no answer to this, but he "had his thoughts," and he kept them to himself.

The hour was quite advanced, for the days were long, so that the fastenings of the house were looked to with great care, and Fred went to the same room he had occupied two nights before, the one immediately preceding having been spent at home, as he partly expected the return of his mother.

After saying his prayers and extinguishing the light, he walked to the rear window and looked out on the solemn scene.

Everything was still, but he had stood thus only for a minute or two, when in the quiet, he detected a peculiar sound, which puzzled him at first; but as he listened, he learned that it came from the smoke-house, a small structure near the wood-house.

Like the residence, it was built of old-fashioned Holland brick, and was as strong as a modern prison cell.

"Somebody is in there stealing meat," was the conclusion of Fred; "I wonder who it can be."

He listened a moment longer, and then heard the same kind of growl he had noticed the day before when standing in front of the lion's cage.

Beyond a doubt the king of beasts was helping himself to such food as suited him.

In a twinkling Fred Sheldon hurried softly down

stairs, cautiously opened the kitchen door, and looked out and listened.

Yes, he was in there; he could hear him growling and crunching bones, and evidently enjoying the greatest feast of his life.

“Now, if he don’t hear me coming, I’ll have him sure,” Fred said to himself, as he began stealing toward the door through which the lion had passed.

CHAPTER XI.

A REWARD WELL EARNED.

THE SMOKE-HOUSE attached to the Perkinpine mansion, as we have already said, was made of bricks, and was a strong, massive structure. Although originally used for a building in which meat was cured, it had been adapted to the purposes of a milk store-house. A stream of water ran through one side and the milk and fresh meats were kept there so long as it was possible during the summer weather.

A supply of mutton and lamb had been placed in it the evening before by Michael, the hired man, a portion for the use of the ladies and a portion for himself, when he should come to take it away in the morning.

There had never been an ice-house on the property, that luxury having been much less known a half a century ago than it is to-day.

The lion, in snuffing around the premises, had scented this store-house of meat, and was feasting himself upon it when detected by Fred Sheldon, who, with very little hesitation, covered the couple of rods necessary to reach it.

It is difficult to comprehend the trying nature of such a venture, but the reward was a gigantic one in the eyes

of Fred, who was very hopeful also of the chance being favorable for capturing the animal.

Having started he did not dare to turn back, but hastened forward on tip-toe, and with a firm hand caught the latch of the door. The instant he did so the latter was closed and fastened.

He expected the lion would make a plunge against it, and break out. Having done all he could to secure him, Fred scurried back through the kitchen door, which he nervously closed after him, and then scampered in such haste to his room that he feared he had awakened the two ladies in the other part of the house.

Hurrying to the window, the lad looked anxiously out and down upon the smoke-house as it was called.

To his delight he saw nothing different in its appearance from what it was when he left it a few moments before.

It followed, therefore, that the lion was within, as indeed was proven by the sounds which reached the ears of the listening lad.

But was the little structure strong enough to hold him? When he broke through his own cage with such ease, would he find any difficulty in making his way out of this place?

These were the questions our hero asked himself, and which he could not answer as he wished.

While the walls of the little building were strong and secure, yet the door was an ordinary one of wood, fastened by a common iron latch and catch, supplemented by a padlock whenever Michael Heyland chose to take

the trouble; but the door was as secure against the animal within with the simple latch in place as it was with the addition of the lock, for it was not to be expected that he would attempt to force his way out in any manner other than by flinging himself against the door itself whenever he should become tired of his restraint.

After a while all became still within the smoke-house, and it must have been that the unconscious captive, having gorged himself, had lain down for a good sleep.

Fred Sheldon was all excitement and hope, for he felt that if the creature could be kept well supplied with food, he was likely to remain content with his quarters for a considerable time.

Tired and worn out, the boy finally lay down on his bed and slept till morning. The moment his eyes were open, he arose and looked out. The smoke-house showed no signs of disturbance, the door remaining latched as it was the night before.

"He's there yet," exclaimed the delighted boy, hurriedly donning his clothes and going down the stairs in three jumps.

He was right in his guess, for when he cautiously peeped through the slats of the window he saw the monster stretched out upon the floor in a sound slumber.

When Fred told the Misses Perkinpine that the lion was fastened in the smoke-house their alarm passed all bounds. They instantly withdrew to the uppermost room, where they declared they would stay until the neighbors should come and kill the creature.

Fred tried to persuade them out of their fears, but it

had been given they told the showman he could rely on what had been said.

Mr. Kincade thereupon instantly made preparations, the group swelling to large proportions, as the news spread that the wild beast had been captured.

The cage of the lion, which had been strongly repaired, was driven to the front of the hotel; Jake Kincade mounted, took the lines in hand and started toward the home of the Misses Perkinpine, the villagers following close beside and after him.

Just as they turned into the short lane leading to the place, whom should they meet but Bud Heyland in a state of great excitement.

He was seen running and cracking his whip over his head, and shouting——

“I’ve got him! I’ve got him! I’ve got the lion!”

The wagon and company halted for him to explain.

“I’ve got him up here in the old maids’ smoke-house. I put some meat in there last night, for I seen tracks that showed me he had been prowling around, and this morning when me and the old man went over to look there he was! I’ll take that reward, Jacob, if you please.”

And the boy grinned and ejected a mouthful of tobacco juice, while the others turned inquiringly toward Fred Sheldon, whose cheeks burned with indignation.

“He tells a falsehood,” said Fred. “He never knew a thing about it till this morning.”

“I didn’t, eh?” shouted Bud. “I’ll show you!”

Thereupon he raised his whip, but Mr. Emery stepped in front and said, calmly:

"Bud, it won't be well for you to strike that boy."

"Well, I don't want anybody telling me I don't tell the truth, for I'm square in everything I do, and I won't be insulted."

Mr. Kincade was on the point of taking the word of Bud Heyland that the reward had been earned by him, when he saw from the disposition of the crowd that it would not permit any such injustice as that.

"If you've got the animal secure I'm satisfied," called out the showman from his seat, as he assumed an easy, lolling attitude. "You two chaps and the crowd can settle the question of who's entitled to the reward between you, and I only ask that you don't be too long about it, for the critter may get hungry and eat his way out."

Mr. Emery, at the suggestion of several, took charge of the investigation.

Turning to Fred he said: "The people here have heard your story, and Bud can now tell his."

"Why, I hain't got much to tell," said the big boy, in his swaggering manner. "As I said awhile ago, I seen signs around the place last night which showed the lion was sneaking about the premises. He likes to eat good little boys, and I s'pose he was looking for Freddy there," said young Heyland, with a grinning leer at our hero, which brought a smile to several faces.

"So I didn't say anything to the old man but just flung a lot of meat in the smoke-house and went home to sleep. This morning the old man awoke afore I did, which ain't often the case, and going over to his work found the trap had been sprung and the game was there.

"The old man (Bud seemed to be proud of calling his father by that disrespectful name) came running home and pitched through the door as white as a ghost, and it was a minute or two before he could tell his story. When he had let it out and the old woman begun to shiver, why I laughed, and told 'em how I'd set the trap and earned the reward. With that the old man cooled down, and I got him back with me to look at the beast, which is still asleep, and then I started to tell you about it, Jake, when I meets this crowd and hears with pain and surprise the awful whopper this good little boy tells I believe he slept in the house there last night, and when he woke up and went out in the smoke-house to steal a drink of milk and seen the lion, he was so scared that he nearly broke his neck running down to the village to tell about it."

This fiction was told so well that several looked at Fred to see what he had to say.

The lad, still flushed in the face, stepped forward and said:

"I'd like to ask Bud a question or two."

As he spoke, Fred addressed Mr. Emery, and then turned toward the grinning bully, who said:

"Go ahead with all you're a mind to."

"You say you put the meat in there on purpose to catch the lion last night?"

"That's just what I done, Freddy, my boy."

"Where did you get the meat?"

"At home of the old woman."

"After you put it in the smoke-house, you didn't go back until this morning?"

"No, sir; my little Sunday school lad."

"Who, then, shut and fastened the door, after the lion walked in the smoke-house to eat the meat?"

Bud Heyland's face flushed still redder, and he coughed, swallowed and stuttered —

"Who shut the door? Why—that is—yes—why what's the use of asking such infarnal questions?" demanded Bud in desperation, as the listeners broke into laughter.

Mr. Emery quietly turned to Kincade, who was leaning back on his elevated seat and said:

"The reward of two hundred dollars belongs to Master Fred here," and the decision was received with shouts of approbation.

Bud Heyland's eyes flashed with indignation, and he muttered to himself; but, in the face of such a number, he dared not protest, and he followed them as they pushed on toward the little structure where the escape beast was restrained of his liberty.

A reconnoissance showed that he was still there, and the arrangements for his transfer were speedily made and carried out with much less difficulty than would have been supposed.

The cage was placed in front of the door of the smoke-house, communication being opened, after an inclined plane was so arranged that the beast could not walk out without going directly into his old quarters.

Several pounds of raw, bleeding meat were placed in the cage, and then the animal was stirred up with a long pole.

He growled several times, got on his feet, looked about as if a little confused, and then seemed to be pleased at the familiar sight of his old home, for he walked deliberately up the inclined plane into the cage, and lay down as if to complete his nap, so rudely broken a few minutes before. The door was quickly closed and fastened, and the escaped lion was recaptured!

When all saw how easily it was done, and recalled the fact that the king of beasts, so far as was known, had injured no person at all, there was a great deal of inquiry for the explanation.

Why was it that, with such opportunities for destroying human life, he had failed to rend any one to fragments?

Jacob Kincade, after some laughter, stated that the lion, although once an animal of tiger-like ferocity and strength, was now so old that he was comparatively harmless. His teeth were poor, as was shown by the little progress he had made with the bony meat in the smoke-house. If driven into a corner he might make a fight, but if he had been loose for a month it was hardly likely he would have killed anybody.

The blow which he received in the eye from Bud Heyland's whip incited him to fury for the moment, but by the time he got fairly outside he was comparatively harmless, and the hurried climbing of the center-pole by Bud Heyland was altogether a piece of superfluity.

As Fred Sheldon had fairly earned the two hundred dollars, he was told to call at the hotel in Totteville that afternoon and it would be paid him,

It is not necessary to say that he was there punctually, for the sum was a fortune in his eyes.

As he came to the porch a number of loungers were there as usual, and Fred found himself quite a hero among his playmates and fellows.

Not only was Jake Kincade present, with his cigar alternately between his finger and lips, but Bud Heyland and a stranger were sitting on the bench which ran along the porch, their legs crossed, one smoking his briar-wood and the other a cigar.

Despite Fred's agitation over his own prospects, he could not help noticing this stranger whom, he believed, he had never seen before.

His dress and appearance were much like those of a cattle drover. He wore a large, gray sombrero, a blue flannel shirt, had no suspenders, coarse corduroy trousers, though the weather was warm, with the legs tucked in the tops of his huge cowhide boots, the front of which reached far above his knees, like those of a cavalryman.

He had frowzy, abundant hair, a smoothly-shaven face—that is, the stubby beard was no more than two or three days old—and he seemed to be between twenty-five and thirty years of age.

Looking at his rather regular features, it would be hard to tell whether he was a good or evil man, but it was very evident that he and Bud Heyland had struck up a strong intimacy, which was growing.

They sat close together, chatted and laughed, and indulged in jokes at the expense of those around them,

careless alike of the feelings that were hurt or the resentment engendered.

As Fred approached he saw Bud turn his head and speak to the stranger, who instantly centered his gaze on the boy, so there could be no doubt that his attention was called to him.

Fred was moving rather timidly toward Kincade, when the stranger raised his hand and crooked his finger toward him. Wondering what he could want, Fred Sheldon diverged toward him and took off his hat.

"I wouldn't stand bareheaded, Freddy, dear," said Bud, with his old grin; "you might catch cold in you brains."

Neither of the others noticed this coarse remark, as the stranger, scrutinizing the boy with great interest, said:

"What is your name, please?"

"Frederick Sheldon."

"And you are the boy who locked the lion in the smoke-house last night when you heard the poor fellow trying to use his aged teeth on some bones?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you deserve credit; for you thought, like everybody else, that he was as fierce as he was a dozen years ago. Well, all I want to say, Fred, is that I'm Cyrus Sutton, stopping here at the hotel, and I'm somewhat interested in cattle. Bud, here, doesn't feel very well, and he's got leave of absence for two or three days and is going to stay at home. Bud and I are strong friends, and I've formed a rather good opinion of you and I con-

gratulate you on having earned such a respectable pile of money. Mr. Kincade is ready and glad to pay you."

Squire Jones, a plain, honest, old man, who had been justice of the peace for fully two score years, went into the inner room with Fred Sheldon and Jacob Kincade to see that everything was in proper shape; for as the boy was a minor his rights needed careful protection.

All was done deliberately and carefully, and the entire amount of money, in good, crisp greenbacks, was placed in the trembling hands of Fred Sheldon, who felt just then as though he would buy up the entire village of Tottenville, and present it to his poor friends.

"Come over to my office with me," said the squire, when the transaction was finished.

The lad willingly walked across the street and into the dingy quarters of the old man, who closed the door and said:

"I am real glad, Frederick, that you have earned such a sum of money, for your mother needs it, and I know you to be a truthful and honest boy; but let me ask you what you mean to do with it?"

"Save it."

"I know, but how and where? It will not be safe in your house nor at the Misses Perkinpines', as the events of the other night prove. It ought to be placed somewhere where it will be safe."

"Tell me where to put it."

"There is the Lynton Bank ten miles away, but you couldn't drive there before it would be closed. I have a

good, strong, burglar-proof safe, in which I have many valuable papers. If you wish it, I will seal the money in a large envelope, write your name on the back and lock it up for you. Then, whenever you want it, I will turn it over to you."

Fred replied that he would be glad to have him do as proposed, and the old squire, with solemn deliberation, went through the ceremony of placing the two hundred dollars safely among his other papers and swinging the ponderous safe-door upon them.

Fred would have liked to keep the money to look at and admire and show to his playmates, but he saw how much wiser the course of the squire was, and it was a great relief to the boy to have the custody of such riches in other hands.

When he came out on the street again he looked across to the hotel and noticed that Bud Heyland and Cyrus Sutton were no longer visible. He supposed they were inside visiting the bar, and without giving them any further thought, Fred started for his home to complete his chores before going over to stay with the Misses Perkinpine.

After reaching a certain point up the road a short cut was almost always used by Fred, who followed quite a well-beaten path through a long stretch of woods.

The boy was in high spirits, for he could not feel otherwise after the wonderful success which had attended his efforts to capture the astray lion.

"If I could only get on the track of the men that stole the silverware and money, why, I would retire

wealthy," he said to himself, with a smile; "but I don't see where there is much chance——"

"Halloo, there, Freddy dear!"

It was Bud Heyland who hailed the startled youngster in this fashion, and when our hero stopped and looked up, he saw the bully standing before him, whip in hand and waiting for him to approach.

CHAPTER XII.

A BUSINESS TRANSACTION.

WHEN Fred Sheldon saw Bud Heyland standing before him in the path, his impulse was to whirl about and run, for he knew too well what to expect from the bully; but the latter, reading his thoughts called out:

"Hold on, Freddy, I won't hurt you, though you deserve a good horsewhipping on account of the mean way you cheated me out of the reward for capturing the lion; but I have a little business with you."

Wondering what all this could mean Fred stood still while the red-faced young man approached, though our hero wished as fervently that he was somewhere else as he did when he found himself face to face with the lion in the lane.

"Jake sent me," added Bud in his most persuasive manner, and with a strong effort to win the confidence of the boy, who was somewhat reassured by the last words.

"What does Mr. Kincade want?" asked Fred.

"Why, he told me to hurry after you and say that he had made a mistake in paying you that money."

"I guess he didn't make any mistake," replied the surprised boy.

"Yes, he did; it's twenty dollars short."

"No, it isn't, for Squire Jones and I counted it over twice."

"That don't make any difference; I tell you there was a mistake and he sent me to correct it."

"Why didn't you come over to Squire Jones' office, then, and fix it?"

"I didn't know you was there."

Fred knew this was untrue, for Bud sat on the porch and watched him as he walked across the street with the squire.

"Well, if you are so sure of it, then you can give me the twenty dollars and it will be all right."

"I want you to take out the money and count it here before me."

"I sha'n't do it."

"I guess you will; you've got to."

"But I can't."

"What's the reason you can't?"

"I haven't got the money with me."

"You haven't!" exclaimed Bud, in dismay. "Where is it?"

"Locked up in Squire Jones' safe."

The bully was thunderstruck, and gave expression to some exclamations too forcible to be recorded.

It was evident that he was unprepared for such news, and he seemed to be eager to apply his cruel whip to the little fellow toward whom he felt such unreasonable hatred.

"I've got a settlement to make with you, any way," he said, advancing threateningly toward him.

"What have I done," asked Fred, backing away from him, "that you should take every chance you can get, Bud, to hurt me?"

"What have you done?" repeated the bully, "you've done a good deal, as you know well enough."

But at this juncture, when poor Fred thought there was no escape for him, Bud Heyland, very curiously, changed his mind.

"I'll let you off this time," said he, "but it won't do for you to try any more of your tricks. When I come to think, it was ten dollars that the money was short. Here is a twenty-dollar bill. I want you to get it changed and give me the ten dollars to-morrow."

Fred Sheldon was bewildered by this unexpected turn to the interview, but he took the bill mechanically, and promised to do as he was told.

"There's another thing I want to say to you," added Bud, stopping as he was on the point of moving away: "You must not answer any questions that may be asked you about the bill."

The wondering expression of the lad showed that he failed to take in the full meaning of this warning, and Bud added, impatiently.

"Don't tell anybody I gave it to you. Say you found it in the road if they want to know where you got it; that's all. Do you understand?"

Fred began to comprehend, and he resolved on the instant that he would not tell a falsehood to save himself from a score of whippings at the hands of this evil boy, who would not have given the caution had he not possessed good reasons for doing so.

Bud Heyland repeated the last warning, word for word, as first uttered, and then, striding by the affrighted Fred, continued in the direction of Tottenville, while the younger boy was glad enough to go homeward.

The sun had not set yet when he reached the house where he was born, and he hurried through with his work and set out for the old brick dwelling, which had been the scene of so many stirring incidents within the last few days.

He was anxious to see his mother, who had been away several days. He felt that she ought to know of his great good fortune, that she might rejoice with him.

“If she doesn’t get there by to-morrow or next day I’ll have to go after her,” he said to himself, “for I’ll burst if I have to hold this news much longer. And won’t she be glad? It’s hard work for us to get along on our pension, and I can see she has to deny herself a good many things so that I can go to school. I thought I would be happy when I got the money, and so I am, but it is more on her account than on my own—halloo!”

It seemed as if the lane leading to the old brick mansion was destined to play a very important part in the history of the lad, for he had reached the very spot where he met the lion the night before, when a man suddenly stepped out from behind one of the trees and stood for a moment, with the setting sun shining full on his back, his figure looking as if it were stamped in ink against the flaming horizon beyond.

As Fred stared at him, he held up his right hand and

crooked his finger for him to approach, just as he did when sitting on the porch of the village hotel, for it was Cyrus Sutton.

The boy was not pleased, by any means, to meet him in such a place, for he had felt suspicious of him ever since he saw him sitting in such familiar converse with Bud Heyland and Jacob Kincade.

Nevertheless, our hero walked boldly toward him, and with a faint "Good-evening, sir," waited to hear what he had to say.

"Your name is Frederick Sheldon, I believe?"

Fred nodded to signify that he was correct in his surmise.

"You met Bud Heyland in the woods over yonder, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir; how could you know it?"

"I saw him going in that direction, and I saw you come out the path; what more natural than that I should conclude you had met? He gave you a twenty-dollar bill to get changed, didn't he?"

"He did, sir," was the answer of the amazed boy, who wondered how it was this person could have learned so much, unless he got the news from Bud Heyland himself.

"Let me see the money."

Fred did not like this peremptory way of being addressed by a person whom he had never seen until that afternoon, but he drew the bill from his pocket.

As he did so he brought several other articles with it, among them his new knife, which dropped to the

ground. He quickly picked them up, and shoved them hurriedly out of sight.

Mr. Sutton did not seem to notice this trifling mishap, but his eyes were bent on the crumpled bill which was handed to him.

As soon as he got it in his hands he turned his back toward the setting sun, and placing himself in the line of some of the horizontal rays which found their way between the trees he carefully studied the paper.

He stood full a minute without moving, and then merely said, "Ahem!" as though he were clearing his throat. Then he carefully doubled up the piece of national currency, and opening his pocket-book placed it in it.

"Are you going to keep that?" asked Fred. "It isn't yours."

"He wanted you to get it changed, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir; but he didn't want me to give it away."

"Of course not, of course not; excuse me, but I only wanted to change the bill for you. Here you are."

Thereupon he handed four five-dollar bills to Fred, who accepted them gladly enough, though still wondering at the peculiar actions of the man.

"One word," he added. "Bud told you not to answer any questions when you got the bill changed. I haven't asked you any, but he will have some to ask himself, which he will be very anxious you should answer. Take my advice, and don't let him know a single thing."

"I won't," said Fred, giving his promise before he thought.

"Very well, don't forget it; he will be on the look-out for you to-morrow, and when you see him, hand him his ten dollars and keep the rest for yourself, and then end the interview. Good evening, my son."

"Good evening," and Fred was moving on, when Mr. Cyrus Sutton said:

"Hold on a minute," at the same time crooking his forefinger in a way peculiar to himself; "I understand you were in the house there the other night, when it was robbed by a tramp."

"I was, sir; the whole village knows that."

"You were lucky enough to get away while it was going on, though you were deceived by the man whom you met here in the lane."

The lad assured him he was correct, as he seemed to be in every supposition which he made.

"Do you think you would know either of those men if you met them again?"

The question was a startling one, not from the words themselves, but from the peculiar manner in which it was asked.

Cyrus Sutton bent forward, thrusting his face almost in that of the boy and dropping his voice to a deep guttural bass as he fixed his eyes on those of Fred.

The latter looked up and said:

"The voice of the man I met in the lane sounded just like yours. Are you the man?"

It surely was a stranger question than that to which the lad had made answer, and Sutton, throwing back his head, laughed as if he would sink to the earth from excess of mirth.

"Well, that's the greatest joke of the season. Am I the other tramp that led you on such a wild-goose chase? Well, I should say not."

Nevertheless Fred Sheldon felt absolutely sure that this was the man he accused him of being.

Mr. Sutton, with a few jesting remarks, bade the boy good-evening, and the latter hastened on to the brick mansion, where he busied himself for a half hour in doing up a few chores that Michael, the hired man, had left for him.

When these were finished, he went into the house, with a good appetite for his supper, which was awaiting him.

The old ladies were greatly pleased to learn he had been paid such a large sum for capturing the lion, and they did not regret the fright they had suffered, since it resulted in such substantial good for their favorite.

"Now, if you could only find our silverware," said Aunt Annie, "what a nice sum you would earn!"

"Wouldn't I? I'd just roll in wealth, and I'd make mother so happy she'd feel miserable."

"But I'm afraid we shall never see the silver again," observed Miss Lizzie, with a deep sigh.

"Wasn't there some money taken, too?"

"Yes; several hundred dollars. But we don't mind that, for we can get along without it; but the silverware, you know, has been in the family for more than two centuries."

"You haven't owned it all that time, have you?"

"My goodness! How old do you suppose we are?" asked the amused old lady.

"I never thought, but it would be a good thing to get the money, too, wouldn't it? Has Archie Jackson been here to-day?"

"Yes. He says that the officer he sent for doesn't come, and so he's going to be a detective himself."

"A detective," repeated Fred to himself. "That's a man, I believe, that goes prying around after thieves and bad people, and is pretty smart in making himself look like other folks."

"Yes," said Aunt Lizzie, "he went all over the house again, and climbed out on top of the porch, and was crawling around there, 'looking for signs,' as he called them. I don't know how he made out, but he must have been careless, for he slipped off and came down on his head and shoulders, and when we ran out to help him up, said some awful bad words, and went limping down the lane."

"He don't know how to climb," said Fred, as he disposed of his usual supply of gingerbread; "it takes a boy like me to climb, a man is always sure to get in trouble."

"Archibald seems to be very unfortunate," said Aunt Annie mildly, and with a meek smile on her face, "for just before he fell off the roof of the porch, he came bumping all the way down-stairs and said the bad man had put oil on them, so as to make him slip to the bottom. I am quite anxious about him, but I hope no bones were broken."

"I saw that his hand was swelled up too," said the sister, "and when I inquired about it he said he caught

it in the crack of the door, playing with his little boy, though I don't see how that could make such a hurt as his was. But there has been some one else here."

"Who was that?" asked Fred, excitedly.

"A very nice, gentlemanly person, though he wasn't dressed in very fine clothes. His name was—let me see, circus-circum—no——"

"Cyrus Sutton?"

"That's it—yes, that's his name."

"What was he after?" demanded Fred, indignantly.

"He said he was staying in the village a little while, and, having heard about our loss, he came out to make inquiries."

"I would like to know what business he had to do that," said the boy, who was sure the old ladies were altogether too credulous and kind to strangers who presented themselves at their doors.

"Why, Frederick, it was a great favor for him to show such an interest in our affairs."

"Yes; so it was in them other two chaps, I s'pose; this ain't the first time Mr. Cyrus Sutton has been in your house."

"What do you mean, Frederick?"

"I mean this," answered Fred, wheeling his chair about and slapping his hand several times upon the table, by way of emphasis, "that Mr. Cyrus Sutton, as he calls himself, is the man I met in the lane the other night, and who climbed into the window and helped the other fellow carry off your plate and money; there!"

The ladies raised their hands in protesting amazement.

"Impossible! You must be mistaken!"

"I know it, and I told him so, too!"

"You did! Didn't he kill you?"

"Not that I know of," laughed Fred. "I don't feel very dead, anyway; but though he had on whiskers the other night as the other one did, I knew his voice."

Young Sheldon did not think it best to say anything about the suspicion he had formed against Bud Heyland, for that was coming so near home that it would doubtless cause immediate trouble.

Nor did he tell how he was sure, only a short time before, that Jacob Kincade was the partner of Bud in the theft, but that the latter, who handed him the two hundred dollars, was relieved from all suspicion, at least so far as the lad himself was concerned.

"Have you told Archibald of this?" asked Aunt Lizzie, when Fred had repeated his declaration several times.

"What's the use of telling him? He would start in such a hurry to arrest him that he would tumble over something and break his neck. Then, he'd get the reward, too, and I wouldn't have any of it."

"We will see that you have justice," said Miss Lizzie, assuringly; "you deserve it for what you have already done."

"I don't want it, and I won't have it until I can earn it, that's certain. I must go to school to-morrow, and I brought over two of my books to study my lessons. I had mother's permission to stay home to go to the circus, but I was out to-day, and I s'pose Mr. McCurtis

will give me a good whipping for it to-morrow. Anyway, I'll wear my trousers down, instead of rolling 'em up, till I learn how the land lies."

This seemed a prudent conclusion, and as the ladies were anxious that their favorite should keep up with his classes they busied themselves with their household duties while the lad applied himself with might and main to his mental work.

At the end of half an hour he had mastered it, and asked the ladies if there was anything he could do for them.

"I forgot to tell Michael," said Aunt Annie, "before he went home, that we want some groceries from the store, and I would like him to give the order before coming here in the morning."

"I'll take the order to him if you will write it out."

Thanking him for his courtesy, the order was prepared, and, tucking it in his pocket, Fred Sheldon started down the road on a trot to the home of Michael Heyland, the hired man.

"I wonder whether Bud is there?" he said to himself, as he approached the humble house. "I don't s'pose he'll bother me, but he'll want to know about that money as soon as he sees me."

Without any hesitation the lad knocked at the door and was bidden to enter. As he did so he saw that Mrs. Heyland was the only one at home.

"Michael has gone to the village," said the lady of the house, in explanation; "but I'm expecting him home

in the course of an hour or so, and perhaps you had better wait."

"I guess there isn't any need of it. Aunt Annie wants him to take an order to the store to-morrow morning before he comes up to the house, and I can leave it with you."

"Is it writ out?"

"Yes; here it is," said Fred, laying the piece of folded paper on the stand beside the Bible and a copy of the *Tottenville Weekly Illuminator*.

The lad had no particular excuse for staying longer, but he was anxious to ask several questions before going back, and he was in doubt as to how he should go about it.

But when he was invited to sit down he did so, and asked, in the most natural manner:

"Where is Bud?"

"He's down to the village, too."

"When will he be home?"

"That's a hard question to answer, and I don't think Bud himself could tell you if he tried. You know he's been traveling so long with the circus and has so many friends in the village that they are all glad to see him and won't let him come home. Bud was always a good boy, and I don't wonder that everybody thinks so much of him."

Fred Sheldon indulged in a little smile for his own amusement, but he took care that the doting mother did not notice it.

"Michael was always hard on Bud, but he sees how

great his mistake was, and when he rode by on the big wagon, cracking his whip, he felt as proud of him as I did."

"Is Bud going to be home long?"

"He got leave of absence for a few days, because the boy isn't feeling very well. They've worked him too hard altogether. You observed how pale-looking he is?"

Fred could not say that he had noticed any alarming paleness about the young man, but he did not deny the assertion of the mother.

"Does Bud like it with the circus?"

"Oh, yes, and they just dote on him. Bud tells me that Colonel Bandman, the owner of the circus and menagerie, has told him that if he keeps on doing so well he's going to take him in as partner next year."

"Mrs. Heyland, why do you call him Bud?"

"He was such a sweet baby that we nick-named him 'Birdy,' and it has stuck by him since. When he went to school he was called Budman, that being a cunning fancy of the darling boy, but his right name is Nathaniel Higgens, though most people don't know it."

Fred Sheldon had got the information he was seeking.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EAVESDROPPER.

FRED SHELDON had learned one most important fact. Beyond all doubt the letters "N. H. H." stood for the name Nathaniel Higgins Heyland, who for some months past had been attached as an employee to Colonel Bandman's menagerie and circus.

By some means, hard to understand, this young man had dropped his pocket-knife, bearing these initials, on the floor of the upper room of the brick mansion, at the time he entered it disguised as an ordinary tramp, and with the sole purpose of robbery.

It was proven, therefore, that Bud had committed that great offense against the laws of his country, as well as against those of his Maker, and he was deserving of severe punishment.

But young, as bright, honest Fred Sheldon was, he knew that the hardest work of all remained before him.

How was the silver plate to be recovered, for the task would be less than half performed should the owners fail to secure that?

How could the guilt of Bud Heyland be brought home to him, and who was his partner?

Although Fred was sure that the stranger who called himself Cyrus Sutton was the other criminal, yet he saw

no way in which that fact could be established, nor could he believe that the proof which he held of Bud's criminality would convince others.

Bud was such an evil lad that he would not hesitate to tell any number of falsehoods, and he was so skilled in wrong talking, as well as wrong doing, that he might deceive every one else.

Fred Sheldon felt that he needed now the counsel of one person above all others. The one man to whom his thoughts first turned was Archie Jackson, the constable, and he was afraid to trust him, for the temptation of obtaining the large reward offered was likely to lead him to do injustice to the boy.

The one person whom he longed to see above all others was his mother—that noble, brave woman whose love and wisdom had guided him so well along his journey of life, short though it had been.

It was she who had awakened in him the desire to become a good and learned man, who had cheered him in his studies, who had entertained him with stories culled from history and calculated to arouse an honorable ambition in his heart.

The memory of his father was dim and misty, but there was a halo of glory that would ever envelop that sacred name.

Fred could just remember the bright spring morning when the patriot, clad in his uniform of a private, had taken his wee baby boy in his arms, tossed him in the air, and, as he came down, kissed him over and over again, and told him that he was the son of a soldier who

intended to fight for his country; and commending him to God and his wife, had resigned him to the weeping mother, who was pressed to his heart, and then, catching up his musket he had hurried out the little gate and walked rapidly down the road.

Held in the mother's arms, Fred had strained his baby eyes until the loved form of his father faded out in the distance, and then the heavy-hearted wife took up the burden of life once more.

But, though she shaded her weary eyes and looked down the road many a time, the husband never came back again. Somewhere, many long miles away, he found his last resting-place, there to sleep until the last trump shall wake the dead, and those who have been separated in this life shall be reunited, never to part again.

Fred's memories of those sad days, we say, were dim and shadowy, but he saw how bravely his mother fought her own battle, more sorrowful than that in which the noble husband went down, and Fred, young though he was, had been all that the fondest mother could wish.

"Let him be spared to me, oh, Heavenly Father," she plead, and henceforth she lived only for him.

It was she who taught him to kneel at her knee and to murmur his prayers morning and evening; who told him of the Gracious Father who will reward every good deed and punish every evil one not repented of; it was she who taught him to be manly and truthful and honest and brave for the right, and whose counsel and guidance were more precious than those of any earthly friend ever could be.

Fred had no secret from her, and now that so much had taken place in the last few days he felt that he could not stand it much longer without her to counsel and direct him.

"I sha'n't tell anybody a word of what I've found out," he said to himself, as he walked thoughtfully along the road, in the direction of the old brick mansion, where he expected to spend the night; "the Misses Perkinpine are such simple souls that they can't help a big boy like me, and though they might give me something, I don't want it unless I earn it. I'll bet mother can give me a lift."

And holding this very high and not exaggerated opinion of his parent's wisdom, he continued onward, fervently hoping that she would return on the morrow.

"We've never been apart so long since I can remember," he added, "and I'm beginning to feel homesick."

The night was clear and starlight, the moon had not yet risen, but he could see very distinctly for a short distance in the highway. He was thinking of nothing in the way of further incident to him, but, as it sometimes happens in this world, the current of one's life, after flowing smoothly and calmly for a long time, suddenly comes upon shoals and breakers and everything is stormy for a while.

Fred, in accordance with his favorite custom, had his trousers rolled high above his knees, and was barefooted. In the dust of the road he walked without noise, and as the night was very still he could hear the least sound.

Though involved in deep thought he was of such a

wide-awake nature that he could never be insensible to what was going on around him. He heard again the soft murmur of the wind in the forest, the faint, distant moan of the river, the cock crowing fully a mile away, answered by a similar signal of a chanticleer still further off, and then all at once he distinctly caught the subdued sound of voices.

He at once stopped in the road and looked and listened. He could see nothing, but his keen ears told him the faint noise came from a point directly ahead, and was either in or at the side of the road.

His intimate knowledge of the highway, even to the rocks and fences and piles of rails, that here and there lined it, enabled him to recall that there was a broad, flat rock, perhaps a hundred rods ahead, on the right side of the path, and that it was the one on which many a tired traveler sat down to rest.

No doubt the persons whose voices reached him were sitting there, holding some sort of conference, and Fred asked himself how he should pass them without discovery, for, like almost every one, he was timid of meeting strangers on a lonely road after dark.

His recourse suggested itself the next minute—he had only to climb the fence and move around them.

At this point there was a meadow on each side of the highway, without any trees near the road, so that great care was needed to avoid observation, but in the starlight night Fred had little doubt of being able to get by without detection.

Very carefully he climbed the fence, and, dropping

gently upon the grass on the other side, he walked off across the field, peering through the gloom in the direction of the rock by the roadside, whence came the murmur of voices.

The boy was so far away that, as yet, he had not caught a glimpse of the others, but when he stopped at the point where he thought it safe to begin to approach the road again, one of the parties gave utterance to an exclamation in a louder voice than usual.

Fred instantly recognized it as that of Cyrus Sutton, the cattle drover, who had formed such a strong friendship for Bud Heyland.

"I'll bet that Bud is there, too," muttered Fred, moving stealthily in the direction of the rock; "they are always—halloo!"

In imitation of the loud voice of Sutton, the other did the same, and in the still night there could be no mistaking it; the only son of Michael Heyland was sitting at the roadside, in conversation with Cyrus Sutton.

It was natural that Young Sheldon should conclude they were discussing the subject of the robbery, and he was at once seized with the desire to learn what it was they were saying, for, more than likely, it would throw some light on the matter.

Fred had been taught by his mother that it was mean to tell tales of, or to play the eavesdropper upon, another, but in this case he felt warranted in breaking the rule for the sake of the good that it might do.

Accordingly, he crept through the grass toward the highway until he caught the outlines of the two figures

between the fence rails and thrown against the sky beyond. At the same time the rank odor of tobacco came stealing through the summer air, as it floated from the strong briar-wood pipe of Bud Heyland.

It was not to be supposed that two persons, engaged in an unlawful business, would sit down beside a public highway and hold a conversation in such a loud voice that any one in the neighborhood would be able to learn all their secrets.

Fred Sheldon got quite close, but though the murmur was continued with more distinctness than before, he could not distinguish many words nor keep the run of the conversation. There may have been something in the fact that the faces of the two, as a rule, were turned away from the listener, but now and then in speaking one of them would look at the other and raise his voice slightly.

This indicated that he was more in earnest just then, and Fred caught a word or two without difficulty, the fragments, as they reached him, making a queer jumble.

Bud Heyland's voice was first identified in the jumble and murmur.

"Big thing—clean two thousand—got it down fine, Sutton."

The reply of the companion was not audible, but Bud continued staring at him and smoking so furiously that the boy, crouching behind them, plainly saw the vapor as it curled upward and tainted the clear summer air above their heads.

In a moment, however, Fred caught the profile of

Cyrus Sutton against the starlight background, while that of young Heyland and his briar-wood looked as if drawn in ink against the sky.

Both were looking at each other, and the words reached him more distinctly.

"Must be careful—dangerous business—been there myself, Bud, don't be in a hurry."

This, of course, was spoken by the cattle drover, and it was plain that it must refer to the robbery. Bud was laboring under some impatience and was quick to make answer.

"Can't play this sick bus'ness much longer—must join the circus at Belgrade in a few days—must make a move pretty soon."

"Won't keep you waiting long—but the best jobs in—country—spoiled by haste. Take it easy till you can be sure how the land lies."

"That may all be—but——"

Just then Bud Heyland turned his head so that only the back portion was toward the listener, and his voice dropped so low that it was some time before another word could be distinguished.

Fred Sheldon was deeply interested, for a new and strong suspicion was beginning to take possession of him.

It seemed to him on the sudden that the two worthies were not discussing the past so much as they were the future.

That is, instead of talking about the despoiling of the Perkinpine mansion, a few nights before, they were laying plans for the commission of some new offense.

"That Sutton is a regular burglar," thought Fred, "and he has come down here to join Bud, and they're going to rob all the houses in the neighborhood. I wonder whom they're thinking about now."

The anxiety of the eavesdropper to hear more of what passed between the conspirators was so great that he grew less guarded in his movements than he should have been.

His situation was such already that had the suspicion of the two been directed behind them they would have been almost sure to discover the listener; but, although they should have been careful themselves, it was hardly to be expected that they would be looking for spies in such a place and at such a time.

Fred caught several words, which roused his curiosity to such a point that he determined to hear more, though the risk should be ten times as great.

As silently, therefore, as possible, he crept forward until he was within a dozen feet of the rock on which Heyland and Sutton sat.

The fact that the two had their faces turned away from him, still interfered with the audibility of the words spoken in a lower tone than the others, but the listener heard enough to fill him not only with greater anxiety than ever, but with a new fear altogether.

Without giving all the fragments his ear caught, he picked up enough to convince him that Bud Heyland and Cyrus Sutton were discussing their past deeds and laying plans for the commission of some new act of evil.

It was the latter fact which so excited the boy that he

almost forgot the duty of using care against being discovered, and gradually crept up near enough to keep the run of the conversation.

But, when he had secured such a position, he was annoyed beyond bearing by the silence, occasionally broken, of the two. It looked, indeed, as if they had got through the preliminaries of some evil scheme, and were now speaking in a desultory way of anything which came in their heads, while one smoked his pipe and the other his cigar.

Cyrus Sutton held a jack-knife in his hand, which he now and then rubbed against a portion of the rock, as if to sharpen the blade, while he puffed the smoke first on the one side of his head and then on the other. Bud was equally attentive to his pipe, the strong odor of which at times almost sickened young Sheldon. Bud had not his whip with him, and he swung his legs and knocked his heels against the rock and seemed as well satisfied with himself as such worthless fellows generally are.

"It's a pretty big thing and it will take a good deal of care and skill to work it through."

This remark was made by Sutton, after a minute's pause on the part of both, and was instantly commented upon by Bud in his off-hand style.

"Of course it does, but don't you s'pose we know all that? Haven't we done it in more than one other place than Tottenville?"

"Yes," said Sutton, "and I've run as close to the wind as I want to, and closer than I mean to again, if I can help it."

"Well, then," said Bud, "we'll fix it to-morrow night."

"All right," said the drover, "but remember you can't be too careful, Bud, for this is a dangerous business."

"I reckon I'm as careful as you or any one else," retorted the youth, "and ain't in any need of advice."

These words disclosed one important fact to Fred Sheldon; they showed that the unlawful deed contemplated was fixed for the succeeding night.

"They're going to break into another house," he mentally said, "and to-morrow is the time. Now, if I can only learn whose house it is, I will tell Archie Jackson."

This caused his heart to beat faster, and again the lad thought of nothing else than to listen and catch the words of the conspirators.

"Do you think we can manage it alone?" asked Sutton, turning his head so that the words were unmistakably distinct.

"What's to hinder? Halloo! what's that?"

Bud Heyland straightened himself and looked up and down the road. The affrighted Fred Sheldon saw his head and shoulders rise to view as he glanced about him, while his companion seemed occupied also in looking and listening.

What was it they had heard? The lad was not aware that he had made the slightest noise, but the next guarded remark of Heyland startled him.

"I heard something move, as if in the grass."

"It would be a pretty thing if some one overheard

our plans," said Cyrus Sutton, turning squarely about, so that his face was toward the crouching lad; "we ought to have looked out for that. Where did it seem to come from?"

"Maybe I was mistaken; it was very faint, and I couldn't think of the right course; it may have been across the road or behind us."

Fred Sheldon began to think it was time for him to withdraw, for his situation was becoming a dangerous one, indeed.

"I guess you were mistaken," said Sutton, off-hand; "this is a slow neighborhood and the people don't know enough to play such a game as that."

"You was saying a minute ago that you couldn't be too careful; I'll take a look across the road and up and down, while you can see how things are over the fence there."

The last clause referred to the hiding place of Fred Sheldon, who wondered how it was he had not already been seen, when he could distinguish both forms so plainly, now that they stood up on their feet.

It looked as if detection was certain, even without the two men shifting their positions in the least.

The lad was lying flat on the ground and so motionless that he might have hoped to escape if special attention were not called to him.

But he felt that if the cattle-drover came over the fence it would be useless to wait a second.

As Bud Heyland spoke he started across the highway, while Cyrus Sutton called out:

“All right!”

As he did so he placed his hand on the top rail of the fence and with one bound leaped over, dropping upon his feet within a few steps of poor Fred Sheldon, who, with every reason for believing he had been seen, sprang to his feet and ran for dear life.

A YOUNG HERO.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRED'S BEST FRIEND.

FRED SHELDON sprang up from his hiding-place in the grass, almost before the drover vaulted over the fence, and ran across the meadow in the manner he did when he believed the wandering lion was at his heels.

Cyrus Sutton seemed to be confused for the minute, as though he had scared up some strange sort of animal, and he stared until the dark figure began to grow dim in the distance.

Even then he might not have said or done anything had not Bud Heyland heard the noise and come clambering over the fence after him.

"Why don't you shoot him?" demanded Bud; "he's a spy that has been listening! Let's capture him! Come on! It will never do for him to get away! If we can't overhaul him, we can shoot him on the fly!"

The impetuous Bud struck across the lot much the same as a frightened ox would have done when galloping. He was in dead earnest, for he and Sutton had been discussing some important schemes, which it would not do for outsiders to learn anything about.

He held his pistol in hand, and was resolved that the spy should not escape him. The skurrying figure was dimly visible in the moonlight, but in his haste and

excitement Bud probably did not observe that the object of the chase was of very short stature.

Sutton kept close beside Bud, occasionally falling a little behind, as though it was hard work.

"He's running as fast as we," said Sutton; "you had better hail him."

Bud Heyland did so on the instant.

"Hold on there! Stop! Surrender and you will be spared! If you don't stop I'll shoot!"

Master Frederick Sheldon believed he was running for life, and, finding he was not overtaken, he redoubled his exertions, his chubby legs carrying him along with a speed which astonished even himself.

The terrible hail of his pursuer instead of "bringing him to," therefore, only spurred him to greater exertions.

"I give you warning," called out Bud, beginning to pant from the severity of his exertion, "that I'll shoot, and when I take aim I'm always sure to hit something."

"That's what makes me so afraid," said Sutton, dropping a little behind, "for I think I'm in more danger than the one ahead."

Bud Heyland now raised his revolver and sighted as well as he could at the shadowy figure, which was beginning to edge off to the left. A person on a full run is not certain to make a good shot, and when the weapon was discharged, the bullet missed the fugitive by at least a dozen feet if not more.

Bud lowered the pistol and looked to see the daring intruder fall to the ground, but he did not do so, and continued on at the same surprising gait.

"That bullet grazed him," said Bud, bringing up his pistol again; "just see how I'll make him drop this time; fix your eye on him, and when I pull the trigger he'll give a yell and jump right up in the air."

To make his aim sure, beyond all possibility of failure, the panting pursuer came to a halt for a moment, and resting the barrel on his left arm, as though he were a duelist, he took "dead aim" at the lad and again pulled the trigger.

But there is no reason to believe that he came any nearer the mark than in the former instance; and when Sutton said with a laugh:

"I don't see him jump and yell, Bud," the marksman retorted:

"You'd better shoot yourself, then."

"No; I was afraid you would shoot me instead of him. I think you came nearer me than you did him. Hark! Did you hear the man laugh then. He don't mind us so long as we keep shooting at him."

"Did he laugh?" demanded Bud, savagely. "If he laughed at me he shall die!"

Hurriedly replacing his useless pistol in his pocket he resumed his pursuit with fierce energy, for he was resolved on overhauling the man who had dared to listen to what had been said.

Had Bud been alone he would have left the pursuit to some one else, but with the muscular Cyrus Sutton at his back he was running over with courage and vengeance.

Although the halt had been a brief one, yet it could

not fail to prove of advantage to the fugitive, who was speeding with might and main across the meadow, and had begun to work off to the left, because he was anxious to reach the shelter of some woods, where he was hopeful of dodging his pursuers.

It would seem that Bud Heyland and Cyrus Sutton could easily outspeed such a small boy as Fred Sheldon, but they were so bulky that it was much harder work for them to run, and they could not last so long.

Hitherto they had lumbered along pretty heavily, but now they settled down to work with all the vigor they possessed, realizing that it was useless to expect to capture the fugitive in any other way.

Meanwhile Fred Sheldon was doing his "level best," active and quick in his movements he could run rapidly for one of his years, and could keep it up much longer than those behind him, though for a short distance their speed was the greater.

Dreading, as he did, to fall into the hands of Bud Heyland and his lawless companion, he put forth all the power at his command, and glancing over his shoulder now and then he kept up his flight with an energy that taxed his strength and endurance to the utmost.

When he found that they were not gaining on him he was encouraged, but greatly frightened by the pistol-shots. He was sure that one of the bullets went through his hat and the other grazed his ear, but so long as they didn't disable him he meant to keep going.

He was nearly across the meadow when he recalled that he was speeding directly toward a worm-fence which

separated it from the adjoining field. It would take a few precious seconds to surmount that, and he turned diagonally toward the left, as has been stated, because by taking such a course, he could reach the edge of a small stretch of woods, in whose shadows he hoped to secure shelter from his would-be captors.

This change in the line of flight could not fail to operate to the disadvantage of the fugitive, for a time at least, for, being understood by Bud and Cyrus, they swerved still more, and sped along with increased speed, so that they rapidly recovered the ground lost a short time before.

They were aiming to cut off Fred, who saw his danger at once, and changed his course to what might be called "straight away" again, throwing his pursuers directly behind him.

This checked the scheme for the time, but it deprived Fred of his great hope of going over the fence directly into the darkness of the woods.

As it was, he was now speeding toward the high worm-fence which separated the field he was in from the one adjoining.

Already he could see the long, crooked line of rails, as they stretched out to the right and left in front of him, disappearing in the gloom and looking like mingling lines of India ink against the sky beyond.

Even in such stirring moments odd thoughts come to us, and Fred, while on the dead run, compared in his mind the fence rails to the crooked and erratic lines he had drawn with his pen on a sheet of white paper.

. Although he could leap higher in the air and further on the level than any lad of his age, he knew better than to try and vault such a fence. As he approached it, therefore, he slackened his gait slightly, and springing upward with one foot on the middle rail, he placed the other instantly after on the topmost one and went over like a greyhound, with scarcely any hesitation, continuing his flight, and once more swerving to the left toward the woods on which he now fixed his hopes.

Possibly Bud Heyland thought that the fact of his being attached to Colonel Bandman's great menagerie and circus called upon him to perform greater athletic feats; for instead of imitating the more prudent course of the fugitive, he made a tremendous effort to clear the fence with one bound.

He would have succeeded but for the top three rails. As it was his rather large feet struck them, and he went over with a crash, his hat flying off and his head ploughing quite a furrow in the ground.

He rolled over several times, and as he picked himself up it seemed as if most of his bones were broken and he never had been so jarred in all his life.

"Did you fall?" asked Cyrus Sutton, unable to suppress his laughter, as he climbed hastily after him.

"I tripped a little," was the angry reply, "and I don't see anything to laugh at; come on! we'll have him yet!"

To the astonishment of the cattle dealer, Bud caught up his hat and resumed the pursuit with only a moment's delay, and limping only slightly from his severe shaking up.

Fred Sheldon was dimly visible making for the woods, and the two followed, Sutton just a little behind his friend.

"You might as well give it up," said the elder; "he's got too much of a start and is making for cover."

"I'm bound to have him before he can reach it, and I'll pay him for all this."

No more than one hundred feet separated the parties, when Fred, beginning to feel the effects of his severe exertion, darted in among the shadows of the wood, and, hardly knowing what was the best to do, threw himself flat on the ground, behind the trunk of a large tree, where he lay panting and afraid the loud throbbing of his heart would betray him to his pursuers, who were so close behind him.

Had he been given a single minute more he would have made a sharp turn in his course, and thus could have thrown them off the track without difficulty; but, as it was—we shall see.

Bud Heyland rushed by within a few feet, and halted a couple of yards beyond, while Sutton stopped within a third of that distance, where Fred lay flat on the ground.

"Do you hear him?" asked Bud.

"Hear him? No; he's given us the slip, and it's all time thrown away to hunt further for him."

Bud uttered an angry exclamation and stood a few minutes listening for some sound that would tell where the eavesdropper was.

But nothing was heard, and Sutton moved forward,



Bud Heyland fell headlong over the fence in pursuit of Fred.
—(See page 151.)

passing so close to Fred that the latter could have reached out his hand and touched him.

"How could he help seeing me?" the boy asked himself, as the man joined Bud Heyland, and the two turned off and moved in the direction of the highway.

Some distance away Bud Heyland and Sutton stopped and talked together in such low tones that Fred Sheldon could only hear the murmur of their voices, as he did when he first learned of their presence beside the road.

But it is, perhaps, needless to say that he was content to let them hold their conference in peace, without any effort on his part to overhear any more of it. He was only too glad to let them alone, and to indulge a hope that they would be equally considerate toward him.

Bud would have continued the search much longer and with a strong probability of success had not Sutton persuaded him that it was only a waste of time to do so. Accordingly they resumed their walk, with many expressions of impatience over their failure to capture the individual who dared to discover their secrets in such an underhanded way.

"He looked to me like a very small man," said Bud, as he walked slowly along, dusting the dirt from his clothing and rubbing the many bruised portions of his body.

"Of course he was," replied Sutton, "or he wouldn't have gone into that kind of business."

"I don't mean that; he seemed like a short man."

"Yes, so he was, but there are plenty of full-grown men in this world who are no taller than he."

"It's too bad, I broke my pipe all to pieces when I fell over the fence, and jammed the stem half way down my throat."

"I thought you had broken your neck," said Sutton, "and you ought to be thankful that you did not."

Bud muttered an ill-natured reply, and the two soon after debouched into the highway, along which they continued until the house of the younger was reached, where they stopped a minute or so for a few more words, when they separated for the night.

Fred Sheldon waited until they were far beyond sight and hearing, when he cautiously rose to his feet and stood for a short time to make sure he could leave the spot without detection.

"I guess I've had enough for one night," he said with a sigh, as he turned off across the meadow until he reached the border of the lane, along which he walked until he knocked at the door of the Misses Perkinpine, where he was admitted with the same cordiality that was always shown him.

They seemed to think he had stayed at the hired man's house for a chat with Bud, and made no inquiries, while the boy himself did not deem it best to tell what had befallen him.

His recent experience had been so severe upon him that he felt hungry enough to eat another supper, and he would not have required a second invitation to do so, but, as the first was not given, he concluded to deny himself for the once.

Fred expected to lie awake a long time after going to

bed, trying to solve the meaning of the few significant words he had overheard, but he fell asleep almost immediately, and did not wake until called by Aunt Lizzie.

This was Friday, the last school-day of the week, and he made sure of being on hand in time. As he had been absent by the permission of his mother, made known through a note sent before she went to see her brother, Mr. McCurtis could not take him to task for his failure to attend school, but a number of lads who had been tempted away by the circus and the excitement over the escaped lion were punished severely.

However, they absented themselves with a full knowledge of what would follow, and took the bitter dregs with the sweet, content to have the pain if they might first have the pleasure.

"I have excused several of you," said the teacher, peering very keenly through his glasses at Fred, "for absence, but I have not been asked to excuse any failure in lessons, and I do not intend to do so. Those who have been loitering and wasting their time will soon make it appear when called on to recite, and they must be prepared for the consequences.

This remark was intended especially for Fred, who was thankful that he found out what the lessons of the day were, for he had prepared himself perfectly.

And it was well he did so, for the teacher seemed determined to puzzle him. Fred was asked every sort of question the lesson could suggest. It had always been said by Mrs. Sheldon that Fred never knew a lesson so long as he failed to see clear through it, and could answer any question germane to it.

He felt the wisdom of such instruction on this occasion, when the teacher at the end of the examination allowed him to take his seat and remarked, half angrily:

"There's a boy who knows his lessons, which is more than I can say of a good many of you. I think it will be a good thing for him to go out and hunt a few more lions."

This was intended as a witticism on the part of the teacher, and, like the urchins of Goldsmith's "Deserted Village," they all laughed with "counterfeit glee," some of the boys roaring as if they would fall off the benches from the excess of their mirth.

Mr. McCurtis smiled grimly, and felt it was another proof that when he became a school teacher the world lost one of its greatest comedians and wits.

At recess and noon Fred was quite a hero among the scholars. They gathered about him and he had to tell the story over and over again, as well as the dreadful feelings that must have been his when he woke up in the night and found that a real, live burglar was in his room.

Like most boys of his age, Fred unconsciously exaggerated in telling the narratives so often, but he certainly deserved credit, not only for his genuine bravery, but for the self-restraint that enabled him to keep back some other things he might have related which would have raised him still more in the admiration of his young friends.

"I'm going to tell them to mother first of all," was

his conclusion, "and I will take her advice as to what I should do."

He brought the lunch the Misses Perkinpine had put up for him, and stayed in the neighborhood of the school-house all noon, with a number of others, who lived some distance away. As the weather was quite warm, the boys sat under a tree, talking over the stirring incidents of the preceding few days.

Fred was answering a question for the twentieth time, when he was alarmed by the sudden appearance of Bud Heyland, with his trousers tucked in his boots, his briar-wood pipe—that is, a new one—in his mouth, and his blacksnake-whip in hand.

As he walked along he looked at the school-house very narrowly, almost coming to a full stop, and acting as though he was searching for some one. He did not observe that half a dozen boys were stretched out in the shadow of the big tree across the road.

"Keep still!" said Fred, in a whisper, "and maybe he won't see us."

But young Heyland was not to be misled so easily. Observing that the school was dismissed, he looked all around him, and quickly espied the little fellows lolling in the shade, when he immediately walked over toward them.

Fred Sheldon's heart was in his mouth on the instant, for he was sure Bud was looking for him.

"He must have known me last night," he thought, "and as he couldn't catch me then he has come to pay me off now."

But it would have been a confession of guilt to start and run, and Bud would be certain to overtake him before he could go far, so the boy did not stir from the ground on which he was reclining.

"Halloo, Bud," called out several, as he approached. "How are you getting along?"

"None of your business," was the characteristic answer; "is Fred Sheldon there?"

"I'm here," said Fred, rising to the sitting position. "What do you want of me?"

Bud Heyland acted curiously. He looked sharply at the boy, and then said:

"I don't want anything of you just now, but I'll see you later," and without anything further he moved on, leaving our hero wondering why he had not asked for the ten dollars due him.

Fred expected he would return, and was greatly relieved when the teacher appeared and school was called. Fearful that the bully would wait for him on the road, Fred went to the old brick mansion first, where he stayed till dark, when he decided to run over to his own home, look after matters there, and then return by a new route to the old ladies who were so kind to him.

He kept a sharp lookout on the road, but saw nothing of either Bud or Cyrus Sutton.

"It seems to me," said Fred to himself, as he approached the old familiar spot, "that I ought to hear something from mother by this time. There isn't any school to-morrow, and I'll walk over to Uncle Will's and find out when she's coming home, and then I'll tell her

all I've got to tell, which is so much, with what I want to ask, that it'll take me a week to get through—halloo! What does that mean?"

He stopped short in the road, for through the closed blinds of the lower story he caught the twinkling rays of a light that some one had started within.

"I wonder whether it is our house they're going to rob to-night," exclaimed Fred, adding the next moment, with a grim humor: "If it is, they will be more disappointed than they ever were in their lives."

A minute's thought satisfied him that no one with a view to robbery was there, for the good reason that there was nothing to steal, as any one would be quick to learn.

"It must be some tramp prowling around in the hope of getting something to eat. Anyway, I will soon find out——"

Just then the window was raised, the shutters thrown wide open by some person, who leaned part way out the window in full view.

One glance was enough for Fred Sheldon to recognize that face and form, the dearest on earth, as seen in the starlight, with the yellow rays of the lamp behind them.

"Halloo, mother! Ain't I glad to see you? How are you? Bless your dear soul! What made you stay away so long?"

"Fred, my own boy!"

And leaning out the window she threw both arms about the neck of the lad, who in turn threw his about her, just as the two always did when they met after a brief separation.

The fact of it was, Fred Sheldon was in love with his mother and always had been, and that sort of boy is sure to make his mark in this world.

A few minutes later the happy boy had entered the house and was sitting at the tea table, eating very little and talking very much.

The mother told him that his uncle had been dangerously ill, but had begun to mend that day, and was now believed to have passed the crisis of his fever, and would soon get well. She therefore expected to stay with her boy all the time.

And then the delighted little fellow began his story, or rather series of stories, while the kind eyes of the handsome and proud parent were fixed on the boy with an interest which could not have been stronger.

Her face paled when, in his own graphic way, he pictured his lonely watch in the old brick mansion, and the dreadful discovery that the wicked tramp had entered the building stealthily behind him. She shuddered to think that her loved one had been so imperiled, and was thankful indeed that Providence had protected him.

Then the story of the lion, of its unexpected breaking out from the cage, the panic of the audience, his encounter with it in the lane, its entry into the smoke-house, his shutting the door, and finally how he earned and received the reward. All this was told with a childish simplicity and truthfulness which would have thrilled any one who had a less personal interest than the boy's mother.

As I have said, there were no secrets that the son kept from his parent. He told how he saw that the tramp wore false whiskers and how he dropped a knife on the floor, which he got and showed to his mother, explaining to her at the same time that the letters were the initials of the young man known through the neighborhood as "Bud" Heyland.

"That may all be," said she, smilingly, "and yet Bud may be as innocent as you or I."

"How is that?" asked Fred, wonderingly.

"He may have traded or lost the knife, or some one may have stolen it and left it there on purpose to turn suspicion toward Bud. Such things have been done many a time, and it is odd that anyone could drop a knife in such a place without knowing it."

Fred opened his eyes.

"Then Bud is innocent, you think?"

"No, I believe he is guilty, for you say you were pretty sure of his voice, but it won't do to be too certain. As to the other man, who misled you when you met him in the lane, it is a hard thing to say who he is."

"Why, mother, I'm surer of him than I am of Bud, and I'm dead sure of him, you know."

"What are your reasons?"

Fred gave them as they are already known to the reader. The wise little woman listened attentively, and said when he had finished:

"I don't wonder that you think as you do, but you once was as sure, as I understand, of Mr. Kincade, the one who paid you the reward."

"That is so," assented Fred, "but I hadn't had so much time to think over the whole matter."

"Very probably you are right, for they are intimate, and they are staying in the neighborhood for no good. Tell me just what you heard them say last night, when they sat on the rock by the roadside. Be careful not to put in any words of your own, but give only precisely what you know were spoken by the two."

The boy did as requested, the mother now and then asking a question and keeping him down close to the task of telling only the plain, simple truth, concerning which there was so much of interest to both.

When he was through she said the words of the two showed that some wicked scheme was in contemplation, though nothing had been heard to indicate its precise nature.

The matter having been fully told the question remained—and it was the great one which underlay all others—what could Fred do to earn the large reward offered by the two ladies who had lost their property?

"Remember," said his mother, thoughtfully, "you are only a small boy fourteen years old, and it is not reasonable to think you can out-general two bad persons who have learned to be cunning in all they do."

"Nor was it reasonable to think I would out-general a big lion," said Fred, with a laugh, as he leaned on his mother's lap and looked up in her eyes.

"No; but that lion was old and harmless; he might have spent the remainder of his days in this neighborhood without any one being in danger."

"But we didn't know that."

"But you know that Bud Heyland and this Mr. Sutton are much older than you and are experienced in evil doing."

"So was the lion," ventured Fred, slyly, quite hopeful of earning the prize on which he had set his heart. "I have been thinking that maybe I ought to tell Mr. Jackson, the constable, about the knife, with Bud's name on it."

"No," said the mother. "It isn't best to tell him anything, for he has little discretion. He boasts too much about what he is going to do; the wise and skilful man never does that."

Mrs. Sheldon had "gauged" the fussy little constable accurately when she thus described him.

"Fred," suddenly said his mother, "do not the Misses Perkinpine expect you to stay at their house to-night?"

"Yes, I told them I would be back, and they will be greatly surprised, for I didn't say anything about your coming home, because I thought Uncle Will was so sick you wouldn't be able to leave him."

"Then you had better run over and explain why it is you cannot stay with them to-night."

The affectionate boy disliked to leave his mother when they were holding such a pleasant conversation, but he could please her only by doing so, and donning his broad-brimmed straw hat, and bidding her good-night, passed out the door, promising soon to return.

Fred was so anxious to spend the evening at home

that he broke into a trot the instant he passed out the gate, and kept it up along the highway until he reached the short lane, which was so familiar to him.

The same eagerness to return caused him to forget one fact that had hitherto impressed him, which was that the conspiracy of Bud Heyland and Cyrus Sutton was intended to be carried out this same evening.

The boy had gone almost the length of the lane when he was surprised to observe a point of light moving about in the shadow of the trees, the night being darker than the previous one.

"What under the sun can that be?" he asked, stopping short and scrutinizing it with an interest that may be imagined.

Viewed from where he stood, it looked like a jack-o'-lantern, or a candle which some one held in his hand while moving about.

It had that swaying, up-and-down motion, such as a person makes when walking rapidly, while now and then it shot up a little higher, as though the bearer had raised it over his head to get a better view of his surroundings.

"Well, that beats everything I ever heard of," muttered Fred, resuming his walk toward the house; "it must be some kind of a lantern, and maybe it's one of them dark ones which robbers use, and they are taking a look at the outside to see which is the best way of getting inside, though I don't think there is anything left for them."

The distance to the house was so short that Fred soon reached the yard. On his way thither the strange light

vanished several times, only to reappear again, its occasional eclipse, no doubt, being due to the intervening vegetation.

When the boy came closer he saw that the lantern was held in the hand of Aunt Lizzie, who was walking slowly around the yard, with her sister by her side, while they peered here and there with great deliberation and care.

"Why, Aunt Lizzie!" called out Fred, as he came up, "what are you looking for?"

The good ladies turned toward him with a faint gasp of fright, and then gave utterance to an expression of thankfulness.

"Why, Frederick, we are looking for you," was the reply, and then, complimenting his truthfulness, she added, "you promised to come back, and we knew you wouldn't tell a story, and sister and I thought maybe you were hungry and sick somewhere around the yard, and if so we were going to get you into the house and give you some supper."

"Why, aunties, I've had supper," laughed Fred, amused beyond measure at the simplicity of the good ladies.

"We didn't suppose that made any difference," was the kind remark of the good ladies, who showed by the observation that they had a pretty accurate knowledge after all of this particular specimen of boyhood.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MEETING IN THE WOOD.

FRED SHELDON told his good friends that inasmuch as his mother had returned, he would stay at home hereafter, though he promised to drop in upon them quite often and "take dinner or supper."

The lantern was blown out and the sisters went inside, where, for the present, we must bid them good-night, and the lad started homeward.

He had not quite reached the main highway, when, in the stillness of the night, he caught the rattle of carriage or wagon wheels. There was nothing unusual in this, for it was the place and time to look for vehicles, many of which went along the road at all hours of the day and night.

But so many strange things had happened to Fred during the week now drawing to a close that he stopped on reaching the outlet of the lane, and, standing close to the shaded trunk of a large tree, waited until the wagon should go by.

As it came nearer he saw that it was what is known in some parts of the country as a "spring-wagon," being light running, with a straight body and without any cover, so that the driver, sitting on the front seat, was the most conspicuous object about it.

As it came directly opposite Fred could see that the driver wore a large sombrero-like hat, and was smoking a pipe. At the same moment, too, he gave a peculiar sound, caused by an old habit of clearing his throat, which identified him at once as Bud Heyland.

"That's odd," thought Fred, stepping out from his place of concealment and following after him; "when Bud goes out at night with a strange wagon or alone, or with Cyrus Sutton, there's something wrong on foot."

Not knowing what was best for him to do, Fred walked behind the wagon a short distance, for the horse was going so slow that this was an easy matter. But all at once Bud struck the animal a sharp blow, which sent him spinning forward at such a rate that he speedily vanished in the darkness.

Young Sheldon continued walking toward home, his thoughts busy until he reached the stretch of woods, where the courage of any boy would have been tried in passing it after nightfall. Brave as he undoubtedly was, Fred felt a little shiver, when fairly among the dense shadows, for there were some dismal legends connected with it, and these had grown with the passage of years.

But Fred had never turned back for anything of the kind, and he was now so cheered by the prospect of being soon again with his mother that he stepped off briskly, and would have struck up one of his characteristic whistling tunes had he not heard the rattle of the same wagon which Bud Heyland drove by a short while before.

"That's strange," thought the lad; "he couldn't have gone very far, or he wouldn't have come back so soon."

The darkness was so profound over the stretch of road leading through the wood that Fred had no fear of being seen as he stepped a little to one side and waited for the vehicle to pass.

Fortunately for night travel, the portion of the highway which led through the forest was not long, for, without the aid of a lantern, no one could see whither he was going, and everything had to be left to the instinct of the horse himself.

The beast approached at a slow walk, while Bud no doubt was perched on the high front seat, using his eyes for all they were worth, which was nothing at all where the gloom was so impenetrable. He must have refilled his pipe a short time before, for he was smoking so vigorously that the ember-like glow of the top of the tobacco could be seen, and the crimson reflection even revealed the end of Bud's nose and the faintest possible glimpse of his downy mustache and pimply cheeks, as they glided through the darkness.

The light from this pipe was so marked that Fred moved back a step or two, afraid it might reveal him to his enemy.

His withdrawal was not entirely satisfactory to himself, as he could not observe where to place his feet, and striking his heels against a fallen limb, he went over backward with quite a bump.

"Who's that?" demanded Bud Heyland, checking

his horse and glaring about in the gloom; "is that you, Sutton?"

Fred thought it wiser to make no response, and he silently got upon his feet again. Bud repeated his question in a husky undertone, and receiving no reply muttered some profanity and started the horse forward at the same slow, deliberate pace.

Wondering what it could all mean, young Sheldon stood in the middle of the road, looking in the direction of the vanishing wagon, of which, as a matter of course, he could not catch the slightest glimpse, and asking himself whether it would be wise to investigate further.

"There's some mischief going on, and it may be that I can—halloo!"

Once more Bud Heyland drew his horse to a halt, and the same solemn stillness held reign as before. But it was only for a minute or two, when Bud gave utterance to a low whistle, which sounded like the tremolo notes of a flute, on the still air.

Fred Sheldon recalled that the bully used to indulge in that peculiar signal when he attended school, merely because he fancied it, and when there could be no significance at all attached to it.

It was now repeated several times, with such intervals as to show that Bud was expecting a reply, though none could be heard by the lad, who was listening for a response.

All at once, yielding to a mischievous impulse, Fred Sheldon replied, imitating Bud's call with astonishing accuracy.

Instantly the bully seized upon it, and the signal was exchanged several times, when Bud sprang out of his wagon and came toward the spot where the other stood.

Fred was frightened when he found there was likely to be a meeting between him and the one he dreaded so much, and he became as silent as the tomb.

Bud advanced through the gloom, continually whistling and giving utterance to angry expressions because he was not answered, while Fred carefully picked his way a few paces further to the rear to escape discovery.

"Why don't you speak?" called out Bud; "if you can whistle you can use your voice, can't you?"

Although this question could have been easily answered, Fred Sheldon thought it best to hold his peace.

"If you ain't the biggest fool that ever undertook to play the gentleman!" added the disgusted bully, groping cautiously among the trees; "everything is ready for——"

Just then an outstretching limb passed under the chin of Bud Heyland, and, though walking slowly, he thought it would lift his head off his shoulders before he could stop himself.

When he did so he was in anything but an amiable mood, and Fred, laughing, yet scared, was glad he had the friendly darkness in which to find shelter from the ugliness of the fellow.

Bud had hardly regained anything like his self-possession when he caught a similar signal to those which had been going on for some minutes between Fred Sheldon and himself. It came from some point beyond Fred, but evidently in the highway.

The angry Heyland called out:

"What's the matter with you? Why don't you come on, you fool?"

The person thus addressed hurried over the short distance until he was close to where Bud stood rubbing his chin and muttering all sorts of bad words at the delay and pain to which he had been subjected.

"Halloo, Bud, where are you?"

Guarded as the voice was, Fred immediately recognized it as belonging to Cyrus Sutton, the cattle drover.

"I'm here; where would I be?" growled the angry bully.

"Tumbling over a fence, or cracking your head against a tree, I suppose," said Sutton, with a laugh; "when I whistled to you, why didn't you whistle back again, as we agreed to do?"

It is easy to picture the scowling glare which Bud Heyland turned upon Sutton as he answered:

"You're a purty one to talk about signals, ain't you? After answering me half a dozen times, and I got close to you, you must shut up your mouth, and while I went groping about, I came near sawing my head off with a knotty limb. When you heard me, why did you stop?"

"Heard you? What are you talking about?"

"Didn't you whistle to me a while ago, and didn't you keep it up till I got here, and then you stopped? What are you talking about, indeed!"

"I was a little late," said Sutton, who began to suspect the truth, "and have just come into the wood; I whistled to you, and then you called to me in a rather

more personal style than I think is good taste, and I came forward and here I am, and that's all there is about it."

"Wasn't that you that answered my whistling a little while ago?" asked Bud Heyland in an undertone, that fairly trembled with dread.

"No, sir; as I have explained to you, I signaled to find where you were only a minute since, and I heard nothing of the kind from you."

"Then we're betrayed!"

Words would fail to depict the tragic manner in which Bud Heyland gave utterance to this strange remark. His voice was in that peculiar condition, known as "changing," and at times was a deep bass, sometimes breaking into a thin squeak.

He sank it to its profoundest depths as he slowly repeated the terrifying expression, and the effect would have been very impressive, even to Cyrus Sutton, but for the fact that on the last word his voice broke and terminated with a sound like that made by a domestic fowl when the farmer seizes it by the head with the intention of wringing its neck.

But Cyrus Sutton seemed to think that it was anything else than a laughing matter, and he asked the particulars of Bud, who gave them in a stealthily modulated voice, every word of which was plainly heard by Fred Sheldon, who began to feel somewhat uncomfortable.

"You remember the man that was behind us listening when we sat on the rock last night?" asked Bud.

"Of course I do."

"Well, he's watching us still, and ain't far off this very minute. I wish I had a chance to draw a bead on him."

"You drew several beads last night," said Sutton.

"See here," snarled Bud, "that's enough of that. I'll give you a little advice for your own good—let it drop."

"Well, Bud," said the other, in an anxious voice, "it won't do to try it on now if some one is watching us. So drive back to Tottenville, put the horse away and we'll take a look around to-morrow night. If the coast is clear we'll wind the business up."

"It's got to be wound up then," said the bully, earnestly; "it won't do for me to wait any longer; I've got to j'ine the circus on Monday, and I must start on Sunday to make it."

"Very well; then we'll take a look around to-morrow and fix things at night."

"Agreed," said Bud, "for you can see that if some officer is watching us—halloo!"

This exclamation was caused by the sudden sound of wagon wheels, and man and boy knew at once that Bud's horse, probably tired of standing still, had started homeward with the enthusiasm of a steed who believes that a good supper is awaiting him.

CHAPTER XVI.

BUD'S MISHAPS.

WHEN a horse takes it into his head to go home, with a view of having a good meal, the attraction seems to become stronger from the moment he makes the first move.

Bud Heyland's animal began with a very moderate pace, but he increased it so rapidly that by the time the angry driver was on the run, the quadruped was going almost equally as fast.

In the hope of scaring the brute into stopping Bud shouted:

"Whoa! whoa! Stop, or I'll kill you!"

If the horse understood the command, he did not appreciate the threat, and, therefore, it served rather as a spur to his exertion, for he went faster than ever.

It is well known, also, that under such circumstances the sagacious animal is only intent on reaching home with the least delay, and he does not care a pin whether his flight injures the vehicle behind him or not. In fact, he seems to be better pleased if it does suffer some disarrangement.

When, therefore, the animal debouched from the wood into the faint light under the stars he was on a gallop, and the wagon was bounding along from side to

side in an alarming way. Bud was not far behind it, and shouting in his fiercest manner, he soon saw that he was only wasting his strength. He then ceased his outcries and devoted all his energies to overtaking the runaway horse.

"It'll be just like him to smash the wagon all to flinders," growled Bud, "and I'll have to pay for the damages."

As nearly as could be determined, horse and lad were going at the same pace, the boy slightly gaining, perhaps, and growing more furious each minute, for this piece of treachery on the part of the horse.

Some twenty yards separated the pursuer from the team, when a heavy, lumbering wagon loomed to view ahead.

"Get out of the road!" called Bud, excitedly. "This hoss is running away, and he'll smash you if you don't!"

At such times a farmer is slow to grasp the situation, and the old gentleman, who was half asleep, could not understand what all the rumpus was about, until the galloping horse was upon him. Then he wrenched his lines, hoping to pull his team aside in time, but his honest nags were as slow as their owner, and all they did was to get themselves out of the way, so as to allow the light vehicle to crash into that to which they were attached.

It is the frailer vessel which generally goes to the wall at such times, though Bud's was armed with a good deal of momentum. As it was the front wheel was twisted off, and the frightened horse continued at a swifter gait

than ever toward his home, while Bud, seeing how useless it was to try to overtake him, turned upon the old farmer, who was carefully climbing out of his wagon to see whether his property had suffered any damage.

"Why didn't you get out the way when I hollered to you?" demanded the panting Bud, advancing threateningly upon him.

"Why didn't you holler sooner, my young friend?" asked the old gentleman, in a soft voice.

"I yelled to you soon enough, and you're a big fool that you didn't pull aside as I told you. I hope your old rattle-trap has been hurt so it can't be fixed up."

"I can't diskiver that it's been hurt at all, and I'm very thankful," remarked the farmer, stooping down and feeling the spokes and axletree with his hands; "but don't you know it is very disrespectful for a boy like you to call an old man a fool?"

Bud snarled:

"I generally say just what I mean, and what are you going to do about it, old Hay Seed?"

The gentleman thus alluded to showed what he meant to do about it, for he reached quietly upward and lifted his whip from its socket in the front of the wagon.

"I say again," added Bud, not noticing the movement, and swaggering about, "that any man who acts like you is a natural born fool, and the best thing you can do is to go home——"

Just then something cracked like a pistol shot and the whip of the old farmer whizzed about the legs of the astounded scapegrace, who, with a howl similar to that

which Fred Sheldon uttered under similar treatment, bounded high in air and started on a run in the direction of his flying vehicle.

At the second step the whip descended again, and it was repeated several times before the terrified Bud could get beyond reach of the indignant gentleman, who certainly showed more vigor than any one not knowing him would have looked for.

"Some boys is very disrespectful, and should be taught manners," he muttered, turning calmly about and going back to his team, which stood sleepily in the road awaiting him.

"What's getting into folks?" growled Bud Heyland, trying to rub his smarting legs in half a dozen places at once; "that's the sassiest old curmudgeon I ever seen. If I'd knowed he was so sensitive I wouldn't have argued the matter so strong. Jingo! But he knows how to swing a whip. When he brought down the lash on to me, I orter just jumped right into him and knocked him down, and I'd done it, too, if I hadn't been afraid of one thing, which was that he'd knocked me down first. Plague on him! I'll get even with him yet. I wish——"

Bud stopped short in inexpressible disgust, for just then he recalled that he had his loaded revolver with him, and he ought to have used it to defend himself.

The assault of the old gentleman was so sudden that his victim had no time to think of anything but to place himself beyond reach of his strong and active arm.

"I don't know what makes me so blamed slow in thinking of things," added Bud, resuming the rubbing

of his legs and his walk toward Tottenville, "but I must learn to wake up sooner. I'm sure I got in some good work to-day, and I'll finish it up in style to-morrow night, or my name ain't Nathaniel Higgins Heyland, and then I'm going to skip out of this slow place in a hurry and have a good time with the boys. What's that?"

He discerned the dim outlines of some peculiar looking object in the road, and going to it, suddenly saw what it was.

"Yes, I might have knowed it!" he muttered, with another forcible expression; "it's a wagon wheel; the second one off that good-for-nothing one I hired of Grimsby, and I'll have a pretty bill to pay when I get there. I 'spose I'll find the rest of the wagon strewed all along the road; yes——"

Bud was not far wrong in his supposition, for a little further on he came upon a third wheel, which was leaning against the fence, as though it were "tired," and near by was the fourth.

After that the fragments of the ruined vehicle were met with continually, until the angered young man wondered how it was there could be so much material in such an ordinary structure.

"It's about time I begun to find something of the horse," he added, with a grim sense of the grotesque humor of the idea; "I wouldn't care if I came across his head and legs scattered along the road, for I'm mad enough agin him to blow him up, but I won't get the chance, for old Grimsby won't let me have him agin when I go out to take a ride to-morrow night."

Things could not have been in a worse condition than when Bud, tired and angry, walked up on the porch of the hotel and dropped wearily into one of the chairs that were always there.

Old Mr. Grimsby was awaiting him, and said the animal was badly bruised, and as for the wagon, the only portion he could find any trace of was the shafts, which came bounding into the village behind the flying horse.

Mr. Grimsby's principal grief seemed to be that Bud himself had not shared the fate of the wagon, and he did not hesitate to so express himself.

"The damages won't be a cent less than a hundred dollars," added the angry keeper of the livery stable.

"Will you call it square for that?" asked Bud, looking at the man, who was leaning against the post in front of him.

"Yes, of course I will?"

"Very well; write out a receipt in full and sign it and I'll pay it."

Mr. Grimsby scanned him curiously for a minute, and then said:

"If you're in earnest come over to my office."

Bud got up and followed him into his little dingy office, where he kept a record of his humble livery business, and after considerable fumbling with his oil-lamp, found pen and paper and the receipt was written and signed.

While he was thus employed Bud Heyland had counted one hundred dollars in ten-dollar bills, which he passed over to Mr. Grimsby, who, as was his custom, counted them over several times.

As he did so he noticed that they were crisp, new bills, and looked as if they were in circulation for the first time.

He carefully folded them up and put them away in his wallet with a grim smile, such as is apt to be shown by a man of that character when he thinks he has got the better of a friend in a bargain or trade.

And as Bud Heyland walked out he smiled, too, in a very meaning way.

CHAPTER XVII.

TWO UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

FRED SHELDON did not give much attention to Bud Heyland after he started in pursuit of his runaway horse, but, turning in the opposite direction, he moved carefully through the wood toward his mother's house.

He did not forget that Cyrus Sutton was somewhere near him, and the boy dreaded a meeting with the cattle drover almost as much as he did with Bud Heyland himself; but he managed to get out of the piece of wood without seeing or being seen by him, and then he made all haste to his own home, where he found his mother beginning to wonder over his long absence.

Fred told the whole story, anxious to hear what she had to say about a matter on which he had made up his own mind.

"It looks as though Bud Heyland and this Mr. Sutton, that you have told me about, are partners in some evil doing."

"Of course they are; it can't be anything else, but what were they doing in the woods with the wagon?"

"Perhaps they expected to meet some one else."

"I don't think so, from what they said; it would have been better if I hadn't whistled to Bud, wouldn't it?"

"Perhaps not," replied the mother, "for it looks as if by doing so you prevented their perpetrating some wrong for which they had laid their plans, and were frightened by finding some one else was near them."

"I'm going to take a look through that wood to-morrow and keep watch; I think I will find out something worth knowing."

"You cannot be too careful, Fred, for it is a wonder to me that you have kept out of trouble so long——"

Both were startled at this moment by the closing of the gate, followed by a rapid footstep along the short walk, and then came a sharp knocking on the door.

Fred sprang up from his seat beside his mother and quickly opened the door. The fussy little constable, Archie Jackson, stood before them.

"Good evening, Frederick; good evening, Mrs. Sheldon," he said, looking across the room to the lady and taking off his hat to her, as he stepped within.

The handsome little lady arose, bowed and invited him to a seat, which he accepted, bowing his thanks again.

It was easy to see from the manner of Archie that he was full of the most important kind of business. He was in danger of tipping his chair over, from the prodigious extent to which he threw out his breast, as he carefully deposited his hat on the floor beside him and cleared his throat, with a vigor which could have been heard by any one passing outside.

"A pleasant night," he remarked, looking benignantly upon Mrs. Sheldon, who nodded her head to

signify that she agreed with him in his opinion of the weather.

After this preliminary he came to the point—that is, in his own peculiar way.

“Mrs. Sheldon, you have a very fine boy there,” he said, nodding toward Fred, who turned quite red in the face.

“I am glad to hear you have such a good opinion of him,” was the modest manner in which the mother acknowledged the compliment to her only child.

“I understand that he is the brightest scholar in school, and has the reputation of being truthful and honest, and I know him to be as full of pluck and courage as a—a—spring lamb,” added the constable, clearing his throat again, to help him out of his search for a metaphor.

Mrs. Sheldon simply bowed and smiled, while Archie looked at his right hand, which was still swollen and tender from its violent contact with the stump that he mistook for the lion some nights before.

He remarked something about hurting it in the crack of the door when playing with his children, and added:

“Fred has become quite famous from the shrewd manner in which he captured the lion.”

“I don’t see as he deserves any special credit for that,” observed the mother, “for I understand the animal was such an old one that he was almost harmless, and then he was kind enough to walk into the smoke-house and give Fred just the chance he needed. I regard it rather as a piece of good fortune than a display of courage.”

"You are altogether too modest, Mrs. Sheldon—altogether too modest. Think of his stealing up to the open door of the smoke or milk-house when the creature was crunching bones inside! I tell you, Mrs. Sheldon, it took a great deal more courage than you will find in most men to do that."

The lady was compelled to admit that it was a severe test of the bravery of a boy, but she insisted that Fred had been favored by Providence, or good fortune, as some called it.

"What I want to come at," added Archie, clearing his throat again and spitting in his hat, mistaking it for the cuspidor on the other side, "is that I would be pleased if he could secure the reward which the Misses Perkin-pine have offered for the recovery of their silverware, to say nothing of the money that was taken."

"It would be too unreasonable to hope that he could succeed in such a task as that."

"I'm not so sure, when you recollect that he saw the two parties who were engaged in the burglarious transaction. I thought maybe he might have some clew which would enable the officers of the law to lay their fingers on the guilty parties."

Fred was half tempted to say that he had such a clew in his pocket that very minute, but he was wise enough to hold his peace.

Once more the constable cleared his throat.

"But such is not the fact—ah, excuse me—I thought that was the spittoon, instead of my hat—how stupid!—and to relieve his mind of the anxiety which I know he must feel, I have called to make a statement."

Having said this much the visitor waited until he thought his auditors were fully impressed, when he added:

"When this robbery was made known to me I sent to New York city at once for one of the most famous detectives, giving him full particulars and urging him to come without delay; but for some reason, which I cannot understand, Mr. Carter has neither come nor written—a very discourteous proceeding on his part, to say the least; so I undertook the whole business alone—that is, without asking the help of anyone."

"I hope you have met with success," was the truthful wish expressed by Mrs. Sheldon.

"I have, I am glad to inform you. I have found out who the man was that, in the disguise of a tramp, eat a meal at the house of the Misses Perkinpine on Monday evening, and who afterward entered the building stealthily, and with the assistance of a confederate carried off all their valuable silverware and a considerable amount of money."

"You've fastened it on Bud, eh?" asked Fred, greatly interested.

The constable looked impressively at the lad, and said:

"There's where you make a great mistake; in fact, nothing in this world is easier than to make an error. I was sure it was Bud from what you told me, and you will remember I hinted as much to him on the day of the circus."

"Yes, and he turned red in the face and was scared."

"His face couldn't turn much redder than it is, and blushing under such circumstances can't always be taken as a proof of guilt; but I set to work and I found the guilty man."

"And it wasn't Bud?"

"He hadn't anything to do with it."

"But there were two of them, for I saw them."

"Of course; and I know the other man also."

This was important news indeed, and mother and son could only stare at their visitor in amazement. The constable, with all the pomposity of which he was master, picked up his hat from the floor and arose to his feet.

"Of course a detective doesn't go round the country boasting of what he has done and is going to do. Those who know me, know that I am one of the most modest of men and rarely speak of my many exploits. But I may tell you that you can prepare yourselves for one of the greatest surprises of your life."

"When is it going to come?" asked Fred.

"Very soon; in a day or two; maybe to-morrow; at any rate by Monday at the latest."

Mrs. Sheldon saw that the fussy officer was anxious to tell more and needed but the excuse of a question or two from her.

But she did not ask him anything, for with the intuition of her sex she had read his nature the first time she talked with him, and she had little faith in his high-sounding declaration of success.

Still, she knew that it was not unlikely he had stumbled upon the truth, while groping about; but she could

form no idea of who the suspected parties were, and she allowed her visitor to bid her good evening without gaining any further knowledge of them.

Archie was heard walking down the path and out the gate, still clearing his throat, and doubtless with his shoulders thrown to the rear so far that he was in danger of falling over backwards.

Mrs. Sheldon smiled in her quiet way after his departure, and said:

"I can't feel much faith in him, but it may be he has found who the guilty ones are."

"I don't believe it," replied Fred, stoutly; "for, when he declares that Bud had nothing to do with it, I know he is wrong. Suppose I had taken out this knife and told him all about it, what would he have said?"

"It wouldn't have changed his opinion, for he is one of those men whose opinions are set and very difficult to change. He is confident he is right, and we shall know what it all means in a short time."

"Perhaps I will find out something to-morrow."

"More than likely you will fail altogether——"

To the surprise of both, they heard the gate open and shut again, another series of hastening steps sounded upon the gravel, and in a moment a quick, nervous rap came upon the door.

"Archie has come back to tell us the rest of his story," said Fred, springing up to answer the summons; "I thought he couldn't go away without letting us know——"

But the lad was mistaken, for, when he opened the

door, who should he see standing before him but Cyrus Sutton, the cattle drover, and the intimate friend of Bud Heyland?

He smiled pleasantly, doffed his hat, bowed and apologized for his intrusion, adding:

"I am sure you hardly expected me, and I only came because it was necessary that I should meet you both. Ah!"

Mrs. Sheldon had risen and advanced a couple of steps to greet her visitor, but, while the words were in her mouth she stopped short and looked wonderingly at him.

And Cyrus Sutton did the same respecting her; Fred, beholding the interesting spectacle of the two, whom he had believed to be utter strangers, staring at each other, with a fixidity of gaze, followed the next moment by an expression of looks and words which showed that this was not the first time they had met.

Fred's first emotion was that of resentment that such a worthless and evil-disposed man should presume to smile, extend his hand and say, as he advanced:

"This is a surprise, indeed! I had no idea that Mrs. Sheldon was you."

"And when I heard of Mr. Cyrus Sutton I never dreamed that it could be you," she answered.

She was about to add something more when he motioned her not to speak the words that he had reason to believe were on her tongue, and Fred knew not whether to be still angrier or more amazed.

Mr. Cyrus Sutton took the chair to which he was

invited and began talking about unimportant matters which it was plain were of no interest to either and were introductory to something that was to follow.

This continued several minutes, and then Mrs. Sheldon asked her visitor to excuse her for a minute or two while she accompanied her son to bed.

"My dear boy," she said, after they were alone in his little room, and he was about to kneel to say his prayers, "you must not be displeased at what you saw to-night. I know Mr. Cyrus Sutton very well and he has called on some business which he wishes to discuss with me alone."

"But he's a thief and robber," said Fred, "and I don't like to have him in the house unless I'm awake to take care of you."

"You need have no fears about me," replied the mother, stroking back his hair and kissing the forehead of the manly fellow. "I would be willing to talk before you, but I saw that he preferred not to do so, and as the matter is all in my interest, which you know is yours, it is proper that I should show that much deference to him."

"Well, it's all right if you say so," was the hearty response of Fred, who now knelt down and went through his prayers as usual.

His mother kissed him good-night and descended the stairs, and in a few minutes the murmur of voices reached the ears of the lad, who could have crept part way down-stairs and heard everything said.

But nothing in the world would have induced him to do such a dishonorable thing, and he finally sank to

slumber, with the dim words sounding to him, as they do to us in dreams.

In the morning his mother laughingly told him he would have to restrain his curiosity for a day or two, but she would tell him all as soon as Mr. Sutton gave his permission.

Fred felt all the eagerness natural to one of his years to know the meaning of the strange visit, but he was content to wait his mother's own good time, when she could make known the strange story which he realized she would soon have to tell him.

This day was Saturday, and Fred Sheldon determined to use it to the utmost, for he knew the singular incidents in which he had become involved were likely to press forward to some conclusion.

After breakfast and his morning chores, he started down the road in the direction of the village, it being his intention to pass through or rather into the wood where Sutton and Bud Heyland had held their meeting of the night before.

He had not reached the stretch of forest when he caught sight of Bud himself coming toward him on foot. The sombrero-like hat, the briar-wood pipe and the big boots, with the trousers tucked in the top, could be recognized as far as visible.

The bully had not his whip with him, both hands being shoved low down in his trousers pockets. He slouched along until close to Fred, when he stopped, and, leaning on the fence, waited for the boy to come up.

Fred would have been glad to avoid him, but there was no good way of doing so. He walked forward, whistling a tune, and made a move as if to go by, nodding his head and saying:

"Halloo, Bud."

"Hold on; don't be in a hurry," said the other, "I want to see you."

"Well, what is it?" asked Fred, stopping before him.

"You want to play the thief, do you?"

"I don't know what you mean," replied Fred, a half-dozen misgivings stirring his fears.

"How about that twenty dollars I gave you to get changed?"

"I declare I forgot all about it," replied Fred, greatly relieved that it was no worse.

"Did you get it changed?"

"Yes, and here are your ten dollars."

Bud took the bills and scanned them narrowly, and Fred started on again.

"Hold on!" commanded the other; "don't be in such a hurry; don't start ahead agin till I tell you to. Did they ask you any questions when you got it changed?"

"Nothing very particular, but changed it very gladly."

"Who was it that done it for you?"

"I told him the one who gave me the bill didn't wish me to answer any questions, and then this gentleman said it was all right, and just for the fun of the thing I mustn't tell anything about him."

Bud Heyland looked at the fellow standing a few feet

away as if he hardly understood what this meant. Finally he asked, in his gruff, dictatorial way:

"Who was he?"

"I cannot tell you."

"You cannot? You've got to."

"But I can't break my promise, Bud; I wouldn't tell a story to save my life."

"Bah, that's some of your mother's stuff; I'll soon take it out of you," said the bully, advancing threateningly toward him. "If you don't tell me all about him I'll break every bone in your body."

"You can do it then, for you won't find out."

Believing that he would have to fight for his very life, as the bully could catch him before he could get away, Fred drew his knife from his pocket, intending to use it as a weapon of defense.

While in the act of opening it, Bud Heyland caught sight of it, and with an exclamation of surprise, he demanded:

"Where did you get that?"

"I found it," replied Fred, who saw how he had forgotten himself in his fear; "is it yours?"

"Let me look at it," said Bud, reaching out his hand for it. Fred hardly knew whether he ought to surrender such a weapon or not, but, as the interest of the bully seemed to center entirely in it, he thought it best to do so.

Bud Heyland examined the jack-knife with great interest. One glance was enough for him to recognize it as his own. He opened the blades and shut them two

or three times, and then dropped it into his pocket with the remark:

"I'll take charge of that, I reckon."

"Is it yours?"

"I rather think it is, now," answered Bud, with an impudent grin! "Where did you find it?"

"Down yonder," answered Fred, pointing in a loose kind of way toward the old brick mansion.

"It was stole from me two weeks ago by a tramp, and it's funny that he lost it in this neighborhood. You can go now; I'll let you off this time, 'cause I'm so glad to get my old knife agin that was give to me two years ago."

And to the surprise and delight of Fred Sheldon, he was allowed to pass on without further questioning.

"I wonder whether I was wrong," said Fred, recalling the words of the bully; "he said he had it stoler from him two weeks ago by a tramp, and mother says that it isn't any proof that Bud is guilty because his knife was found there. Some one might have put it on the floor on purpose, and she says that just such things have been done before by persons who didn't want to be suspected."

"That agrees with what the constable says, too," added the boy, still following the same line of thought, "he is sure he has got the right man and it isn't Bud or Cyrus Sutton. Bud is bad enough to do anything of the kind, but maybe I was mistaken."

The lad was sorely puzzled, for matters were taking a shape which would have puzzled an older head than his.

Everything he had seen and heard for the last few days confirmed his theory that Heyland and Sutton were the guilty ones, and now the theory was being upset in a singular fashion.

Fred was in this mental muddle when he awoke to the fact that he had passed the boundary of the wood and would soon be beyond the place where he had intended to make some observations that day.

"I don't know whether there's any use in my trying to do anything," he said, still bewildered over what he had seen and heard within the last few hours.

Nevertheless, he did try hard, and we may say, succeeded, too.

He first looked hastily about him, and seeing no one, turned around and ran back into the wood. He did not remain in the highway itself, but entered the undergrowth, where it would be difficult for any one in the road to detect him.

"I noticed that when I spoke about coming here this morning, mother encouraged me, and told me to be careful, and so I will."

He now began picking his way through the dense wood with the care of a veritable American Indian stealing upon the camp of an enemy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EUREKA!

THIS WAS the wood where Bud Heyland and Cyrus Sutton held their stolen interview the night before. The former was now in the immediate neighborhood, so that Fred Sheldon had reason to think something would be done in the same place before the close of day, or at most, before the rising of to-morrow's sun.

No one could have been more familiar with this small stretch of forest than was our young hero, who did not take a great while to reach a point close to the other side.

He was near the road which wound its way through it, but was on the watch to escape being seen by any one passing by.

Having reached this point, Fred stood several minutes, uncertain what he ought to do. Evidently there was nothing to be gained by advancing further, nor by turning back, so he waited.

"I wonder where Bud has gone. There is something in the wood which he is interested in——"

The thought was not expressed when the rustling of leaves was heard, and Fred knew some one was near him. Afraid of being discovered, he shrank close to the trunk

of a large tree, behind which he could hide himself the moment it became necessary.

No doubt the person moving through the wood was using some care, but he did not know how to prevent the rustling of the leaves, and it is not likely he made much effort.

At any rate the advantage was on the side of Fred, who, a minute later, caught sight of a slouchy sombrero and briarwood pipe moving along at a height of five feet or so above the ground, while now and then the motion of the huge boots was seen beneath.

"It's Bud, and he's looking for something," was the conclusion of Fred, fairly trembling with excitement; "and it won't do for him to see me watching him."

The trouble was that it was now broad daylight, and it is no easy matter for one to shadow a person without being observed; but Fred had the advantage of the shelter in the dense growth of shrubbery which prevailed in most parts of the wood.

However, he was in mortal dread of discovery by Bud, for he believed the ugly fellow would kill him should he find him watching his movements.

It was this fear which caused the lad to wait a minute or two after Bud Heyland had disappeared, and until the rustling of the leaves could no longer be heard.

Then, with the utmost care, he began picking his way through the undergrowth, stopping suddenly when he caught the sound again.

The wood was not extensive enough to permit a very extended hunt, and when Fred paused a second time he was sure the end was at hand.

He was alarmed when he found, from the stillness, that Bud Heyland was not moving. Fred waited quietly, and then began slowly rising until he stood at his full height, and looked carefully around him.

Nothing could be seen of the bully, though the watcher was confident he was not far off, and it would not do to venture any further just then.

"If it was only the night time," thought Fred, "I wouldn't be so scared, for he might take me for a man; but it would never do for him to find me here."

The sudden ceasing of the rustling, which had betrayed the passage of Bud Heyland a few minutes previous could not be anything else but proof that he was near by.

"Maybe he suspects something, and is waiting to find whether he is seen by any one. Strange that in looking round he does not look up," whispered Fred to himself, recalling an anecdote which he had once heard told in Sunday-school: "Bud looks everywhere but above, where there is that Eye which never sleeps, watching his wrong-doing."

A boy has not the patience of a man accustomed to watching and waiting, and when several minutes had passed without any new developments, Fred began to get fidgety.

"He has gone on further, and I have lost him; he has done this to lead me off, and I won't see anything more of him."

But the boy was in error, and very speedily saw a good deal more of Bud Heyland than he wished.

The rustling of the leaves, such as is heard when one is kicking them up as he walks along, aroused the watcher the next minute, and Fred stealthily arose, and scanned his surroundings.

As he did so, he caught sight of Bud Heyland walking in such a direction that he was certain to pass close to him. Luckily the bully was looking another way at that moment, or he would have seen the scared face as it presented itself to view.

As Fred dropped out of sight and hastily crept behind the large tree-trunk he felt that he would willingly give the two hundred dollars that he received in the way of a reward could he but be in any place half a mile or more away.

It would never do to break into a run as he felt like doing, for then he would be sure to be discovered and captured, while there was a slight probability of not being seen if he should remain where he was.

Shortly after Fred caught sight of a pair of huge boots stalking through the undergrowth, and he knew only too well what they contained. He shrank into as close quarters as possible, and prayed that he might not be noticed.

The prayer was granted, although it will always remain a mystery to Fred Sheldon how it was Bud Heyland passed so very close to him and yet never turned his eyes from staring straight ahead.

But Bud went on, vanished from sight, and in a few minutes the rattling of the dry leaves ceased and all was quiet. The sound of wagon wheels, as a vehicle moved

over the road, was heard, and then all became still again.

Not until sure the fellow was out of sight did Fred rise to his feet and move away from his hiding place. Then, instead of following Bud, he walked in the opposite direction.

"He has been out here to hunt for something and didn't find it."

Looking down to the ground the bright-eyed lad was able to see where Bud had stirred the leaves, as he carelessly walked along, no doubt oblivious of the fact that his own thoughtlessness might be used against him.

"He's the only one who has been here lately, and I think I can track him through the wood. If he had been as careful as I, he wouldn't have left such tell-tale footprints."

The work of trailing Bud, as it may be called, was not such an easy matter as Fred had supposed, for he soon found places where it was hard to tell whether or not the leaves had been disturbed by the boots of a person or the hoofs of some quadruped.

But Fred persevered, and at the end of half an hour, by attentively studying the ground, he reached a point a little over two hundred yards from where he himself had been hiding, and where he was certain Bud Heyland had been.

"Here's where he stopped, and after a while turned about and went back again," was the conclusion of Fred; "though I can't see what he did it for."

It was no longer worth while to examine the ground,

for there was nothing to be learned there, and Fred began studying the appearance of things above the earth.

There were a number of varieties of trees growing about him—oak, maple, birch, chestnut and others, such as Fred had looked on many a time before, and nothing struck him as particularly worthy of notice.

But, hold! only a short ways off was an oak, or rather the remains of one, for it had evidently been struck by lightning and shattered. It had never worn a comely appearance, for its trunk was covered with black, scraggy excrescences, like the warts which sometimes disfigure the human skin.

Furthermore, the lower portion of the trunk was hollow, the width of the cavity being fully a foot at the base. The bolt from heaven had scattered the splinters, limbs and fragments in all directions, and no one could view this proof of the terrific power of that comparatively unknown force in nature without a shudder.

Fred Sheldon stood looking around him until his eye rested on this interesting sight, when he viewed it some minutes more, with open eyes and mouth.

Then, with a strange feeling, he walked slowly toward the remains of the trunk, and stepping upon one of the broken pieces, drew himself up and peered down into the hollow, rotten cavity.

He had been standing in the sunshine but a short time before, and it takes the pupil of the eye some time to become adapted to such a sudden change.

At first all was blank darkness, but shortly Fred saw something gleaming in the bottom of the opening. He

thought it was that peculiar fungus growth known as "fox-fire," but his vision rapidly grew more distinct, and drawing himself further up, he reached down and touched the curious objects with his hand.

Eureka!

There was all the silver plate which had been stolen from the old brick mansion a few nights before. Not a piece was missing!

Fred Sheldon had discovered it at last, and as he dropped back again on his feet, he threw his cap into the air and gave a shout, for just about that time he felt he was the happiest youngster in the United States of America!



On finding the stolen silver, Fred threw his cap in the air and gave a shout.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SLIGHT MISTAKE.

WHEN Archibald Jackson, constable of Tottenham and the surrounding country, strode forth from the home of Widow Sheldon on the night of the call which we have described, he felt like "shaking hands with himself," for he was confident he had made one of the greatest strikes that ever came in the way of any one in his profession—a strike that would render him famous throughout the country, and even in the city of New York.

"A man has to be born a detective," he said, as he fell over a wheelbarrow at the side of the road; "for without great natural gifts he cannot attain to pre-eminence, as it were, in his profession. I was born a detective, and would have beaten any of those fellows from Irish Yard or Welsh Yard or Scotland Yard, or whatever they call it.

"Queer I never thought of it before, but that was always the trouble with me; I've been too modest," he added, as he climbed over the fence to pick up his hat, which a limb had knocked off; "but when this robbery at the Misses Perkinpine's occurred, instead of relying on my own brains I must send for Mr. Carter, and was worried half to death because he didn't come.

"I s'pose he found the task was too gigantic for him, so he wouldn't run the risk of failure. Then for the first time I sot down and begun to use my brains. It didn't take me long to work the thing out; it came to me like a flash, as it always does to men of genius—confound that root; it's ripped the toe of my shoe off."

But Archie was so elevated in the region of conceit and self-satisfaction that he could not be disturbed by the petty annoyances of earth; he strode along the road with his chest thrust forward and his head so high in air that it was no wonder his feet tripped and bothered him now and then.

"I don't see any use of delaying the blow," he added, as he approached his home; "it will make a sensation to-morrow when the exposure is made. The New York papers will be full of it and they will send their reporters to interview me. They'll print a sketch of my life and nominate me for governor, and the illustrated papers will have my picture, and my wife Betsey will find what a man of genius her husband—ah! oh! I forgot about that post!"

He was recalled to himself by a violent collision with the hitching-post in front of his own house, and picking up his hat and waiting until he could gain full command of his breath, he entered the bosom of his family fully resolved to "strike the blow" on the morrow, which should make him famous throughout the country.

With the rising of the sun he found himself feeling more important than ever. Swallowing his breakfast hastily and looking at his bruised knuckles, he bade his

family good-by, telling his wife if anybody came after him they should be told that the constable had gone away on imperative business.

With this farewell Archie went to the depot, boarded the cars and started for the country town of Walsingham, fifty miles distant. He bought a copy of a leading daily, and after viewing the scenery for several miles, pretended to read, while he gave free rein to his imagination and drew a gorgeous picture of the near future.

"To-morrow the papers will be full of it," he said, not noticing that several were smiling because he held the journal upside down, "and they'll want to put me on the force in New York. They've got to pay me a good salary if they get me—that's sartin."

Some time after he drew forth a couple of legal documents, which he read with care, as he had read them a score of times. They were correctly-drawn papers calling for the arrest of two certain parties.

"The warrants are all right," mused the officer, as he replaced them carefully in the inside pocket of his coat, "and the two gentlemen—and especially one of them—will open his eyes when I place my hand on his shoulder and tell him he is wanted."

A couple of hours later, the constable left the cars at the town of Walsingham, which was in the extreme corner of the county that also held Tottenville, and walked in his pompous fashion toward that portion where Colonel Bandman's menagerie and circus were making ready for the usual display.

It was near the hour of noon, and the regular street

parade had taken place, and the hundreds of people from the country were tramping back and forth, crunching peanuts, eating lunch and making themselves ill on the diluted stuff sold under the name of lemonade.

The constable paid scarcely any heed to these, but wended his way to the hotel, where he inquired for Colonel Bandman, the proprietor of the establishment which was creating such an excitement through the country.

Archie was told that he had just sat down to dinner, whereupon he said he would wait until the gentleman was through, as he did not wish to be too severe upon him. Then the officer occupied a chair by the window on the inside, and feeling in his pockets, to make sure the warrants were there, he kept an eye on the dining-room, to be certain the proprietor did not take the alarm and get away.

After a long time Colonel Bandman, a tall, well-dressed gentleman, came forth, hat in hand, and looked about him, as if he expected to meet some one.

"Are you the gentleman who was inquiring for me?" he asked, advancing toward the constable, who rose to his feet, and with all the impressiveness of manner which he could assume, said, as he placed his hand on his shoulder:

"Colonel James Bandman, you are my prisoner!"

The other donned his hat, looked somewhat surprised, as was natural, and with his eyes fixed on the face of the constable, asked:

"On what charge am I arrested?"

"Burglary."

"Let me see the warrant."

"Oh, that's all right," said Mr. Jackson, drawing forth a document from his pocket and opening it before him; "read it for yourself."

The colonel glanced at it for a moment, and said with a half smile:

"My name is not mentioned there; that calls upon you to arrest Thomas Gibby, who is my ticket agent."

"Oh, ah—that's the wrong paper; here's the right one."

With which he gave Colonel James Bandman the pleasure of reading the document, which, in due and legal form, commanded Archibald Jackson to take the gentleman into custody.

"I presume the offense is bailable?" asked the colonel, with an odd smile.

"Certainly, certainly, sir; I will accompany you before a magistrate who will fix your bail. Where can I find Mr. Gibby?"

"I will bring him, if you will excuse me for a minute."

Colonel Bandman started to enter the hotel again, but the vigilant constable caught his arm:

"No you don't; I'll stay with you, please; we'll go together; I don't intend you shall slip through my fingers."

The colonel was evidently good-natured, for he only laughed and then, allowing the officer to take his arm, started for the dining-room, but unexpectedly met the individual whom they wanted in the hall.

When Gibby had been made acquainted with the business of the severe-looking official he was disposed to get angry, but a word and a suggestive look from Colonel Bandman quieted him, and the two walked with the officer in the direction of a magistrate.

"I've got this thing down fine on you," ventured Mr. Jackson, by way of helping them to a feeling of resignation, "the proofs of the nefarious transaction in which you were engaged being beyond question."

Colonel Bandman made no answer, though his companion muttered something which their custodian did not catch. As they walked through the street they attracted some attention, but it was only a short distance to the magistrate's office, where the official listened attentively to the complaints. When made aware of its character he turned smilingly toward the chief prisoner and said:

"Well, colonel, what have you to say to this?"

"I should like to ask Mr. Jackson on what grounds he bases his charge of burglary against me."

"The house of the Misses Perkinpine, near Tottenville, in this county, was robbed of a lot of valuable silver plate and several hundred dollars in money on Monday night last. It was the night before the circus showed in that town. Fortunately for the cause of justice the two parties were seen and identified, especially the one who did the actual robbing. A bright young boy, who is very truthful, saw the robber at his work, identified him as the ungrateful wretch who was given his supper by the two excellent ladies, whom he basely

robbed afterward. The description of the pretended tramp corresponds exactly with that of Colonel Bandman—so closely, indeed, that there can be no mistake about him. The account of his confederate is not so full, but it is sufficient to identify him as Mr. Gibby, there. When I was assured beyond all mistake that they were the two wretches I took out them warrants in proper form, as you will find, and I now ask that they may be held to await the action of the grand jury.”

Having delivered himself of this rather grandiloquent speech, Mr. Jackson bowed to the court and stepped back to allow the accused to speak.

Colonel Bandman, instead of doing so, turned to the magistrate and nodded for him to say something. That official, addressing himself to the constable, asked:

“ You are certain this offense was committed on last Monday evening?”

“ There can be no possible mistake about it.”

“ And it was done by these two?”

“ That is equally sartin.”

“ If one is guilty both are; if one is innocent so is the other?”

“ Yes, sir; if you choose to put it that way.”

“ It becomes my duty to inform you then, Mr. Jackson, that Colonel Bandman has not been out of the town of Walsingham for the past six weeks; he is an old schoolmate of mine, and on last Monday night he stayed in my house with his wife and daughter. This complaint is dismissed, and the best thing you can do is to hasten home by the next train. Good day, sir.”

Archie wanted to say something, but he could think of nothing appropriate, and, catching up his hat, he made haste to the station where he boarded the cars without a ticket. He was never known to refer to his great mistake afterward unless some one else mentioned it, and even then the constable always seemed anxious to turn the subject to something else.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL IN GOOD TIME.

BETWEEN nine and ten o'clock on the Saturday evening succeeding the incidents I have described, a wagon similar to the one wrecked the night before, drove out of Tottenville with two persons on the front seat.

The driver was Jacob Kincade, who, having safely passed the recaptured lion over to Colonel Bandman, secured a couple of days' leave of absence and hurried back to Tottenville, where he engaged the team, and, accompanied by Bud Heyland, drove out in the direction of the wood where matters went so unsatisfactorily when Bud assumed charge.

"I was awful 'fraid you wouldn't come to time," said Bud, when they were fairly beyond the village, "which is why I tried to run the machine myself and got things mixed. Sutton insisted on waiting till you arriv', but when he seen how sot I was he give in and 'greed to meet me at the place."

"That was all well enough," observed Mr. Kincade; "but there's some things you tell me which I don't like. You said some one was listening behind the fence the other night when you and Sutton was talking about this business."

"That's so; but Sutton showed me afterwards that the man, who was short and stumpy, couldn't have heard anything that would let him know what he was driving at. We have a way of talking that anybody else might hear every word and yet he wouldn't understand it. That's an idee of mine."

"But you said some one—and I've no doubt it's the same chap—was whistling round the wood last night and scared you, so you made up your mind to wait till to-night."

"That rather got me, but Sut says that no man that 'spected anything wrong would go whistling round the woods in that style. That ain't the way detectives do."

"Maybe not, but are you sure there ain't any of them detectives about?"

"Me and Sut have been on the watch, and there hasn't been a stranger in the village that we don't know all about. That's the biggest joke I ever heard of," laughed Bud, "that 'ere Jackson going out to Walsingham and arresting the colonel and Gibby."

"Yes," laughed Kincade, "it took place just as I was coming away. I wish they'd locked up the colonel for awhile, just for the fun of the thing. But he and Gibby were discharged at once. I came on in the same train with Jackson, though I didn't talk with him about it, for I saw he felt pretty cheap."

"However, added Kincade, "that's got nothing to do with this business, which I feel a little nervous over. It was a mighty big load for us to get out in the wood last Monday night, and I felt as though my back was

broke when we put the last piece in the tree. S'pose somebody has found it!"

"No danger of that," said Bud. "I was out there to-day and seen that it was all right."

"Sure nobody was watching you?"

"I took good care of that. We'll find it there just as we left it, and after we get it into the wagon we'll drive over to Tom Carmen's and he'll dispose of it for us."

Tom Carmen lived at the "Four Corners," as the place was called, and had the reputation of being engaged in more than one kind of unlawful business. It was about ten miles off, and the thieves intended to drive there and place their plunder in his hands, he agreeing to melt it up and give them full value, less a small commission for his services.

The arrangement with Carmen had not been made until after the robbery, which accounts for the hiding of the spoils for several days. It did not take long, however, to come to an understanding with him, and the plunder would have been taken away the preceding night by Bud Heyland and Cyrus Sutton but for the mishaps already mentioned.

"You're sure Sutton will be there?" asked Kincade, as they approached the wood.

"You can depend on him every time," was the confident response; "he was to go out after dark to make sure that no one else is prowling around. He's one of the best fellows I ever met," added Bud, who was enthusiastic over his new acquaintance; "we've fixed up half a dozen schemes that we're going into as soon as we get this off our hands."

"Am I in?"

"Of course," said Bud; "the gang is to be us three, and each goes in on the ground floor. We're going to make a bigger pile than Colonel Bandman himself, even with all his menagerie and circus."

"I liked Sutton—what little I seen of him," said Kincade.

"Oh, he's true blue—well, here we are."

Both ceased talking as they entered the shadow of the wood, for, bad as they were, they could not help feeling somewhat nervous over the prospect.

The weather had been clear and pleasant all the week, and the stars were shining in an unclouded sky, in which there was no moon. A few minutes after they met a farmer's wagon, which was avoided with some difficulty, as it was hard to see each other, but the two passed in safety, and reached the spot they had in mind.

Here Bud Heyland took the reins, because he knew the place so well, and drew the horse aside until he and the vehicle would clear any team that might come along.

To prevent any such accident as that of the preceding night the animal was secured, and the man and big boy stepped carefully a little further into the wood, Bud uttering the same signal as before.

It was instantly answered from a point near at hand, and the next minute Cyrus Sutton came forward, faintly visible as he stepped close to them and spoke:

"I've been waiting more than two hours, and thought I heard you coming a half dozen times."

He shook hands with Kincade and Bud, the latter asking:

"Is everything all right?"

"Yes, I've had my eyes open, you may depend."

"Will there be any risk in leaving the horse here?" asked Kincade.

"None at all—no one will disturb him."

"Then we had better go on, for there's a pretty good load to carry."

"I guess I can find the way best," said Bud, taking the lead. "I've been over the route so often I can follow it with my eyes shut."

Sutton was also familiar with it, and though it cost some trouble and not a little care, they advanced without much difficulty. Bud regretted that he had not brought his bull's eye lantern with him, and beyond question it would have been of service, but Sutton said it might attract attention, and it was better to get along without it if possible.

The distance was considerable, and all of half an hour was taken in making their way through the wood, the darkness being such in many places that they had to hold their hands in front of them to escape collision with limbs and trunks of trees.

"Here we are!"

It was Bud Heyland who spoke, and in the dim light his companions saw that he was right. There was a small, natural clearing, which enabled them to observe the blasted oak without difficulty.

The little party stood close by the hiding-place of the plunder that had been taken from the old brick mansion several nights before.

"You can reach down to it, can't you?" asked Sutton, addressing Bud Heyland.

"Yes; it's only a little ways down."

"Hand it out, then," added Kincade; "I shan't feel right till we have all this loot safely stowed away with Tom Carmen at the 'Four Corners.'"

"All right," responded Bud, who immediately thrust his head and shoulders into the cavity.

He remained in this bent position less than a minute, when he jerked out his head as though some serpent had struck at him with his fangs, and exclaimed:

"It's all gone!"

"What?" gasped Jake Kincade.

"Somebody has taken everything away——"

In the dim light, Bud Heyland at that juncture observed something which amazed him still more. Instead of two men there were three, and two of them were struggling fiercely together.

These were Cyrus Sutton and Jacob Kincade, but the struggle was short. In a twinkling the showman was thrown on his back, and the nippers placed on his wrists.

"It's no use," said Sutton, as he had called himself, in a low voice; "the game is up, Jacob."

Before Bud Heyland could understand that he and Kincade were entrapped, the third man sprang forward and manipulated the handcuffs so dexterously that Bud quickly realized he was a helpless captive.

This third man was Archie Jackson, the constable, who could not avoid declaring in a louder voice than was necessary.

“We’ve got you both, and you may as well take it like men. This gentleman whom you two took for Cyrus Sutton, a cattle drover, is my old friend James Carter, the detective, from New York.”

And such was the truth indeed.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOW IT WAS DONE.

AS WAS intimated at the close of the preceding chapter, the individual who has figured thus far as Cyrus Sutton, interested in the cattle business, was in reality James Carter, the well-known detective of the metropolis.

When he received word from Archie Jackson of the robbery that had been committed near Tottenville, he went out at once to the little town to investigate. Mr. Carter was a shrewd man, who understood his business, and he took the precaution to go in such a disguise that the fussy little constable never once suspected his identity. The detective wished to find out whether it would do to trust the officer, and he was quick to see that if Jackson was taken into his confidence, he would be likely to spoil everything, from his inability to keep a secret.

So the real detective went to work in his own fashion, following up the clues with care, and allowing Jackson to disport himself as seemed best.

He was not slow to fix his suspicions on the right parties, and he then devoted himself to winning the confidence of Bud Heyland. It would have been an easy matter to fasten the guilt on this bad boy, but the

keen-witted officer was quick to perceive that he had struck another and more important trail, which could not be followed to a successful conclusion without the full confidence of young Heyland.

He learned that Bud was being used as a tool by other parties, who were circulating counterfeit money, and Jacob Kincade was one of the leaders, with the other two who composed the company in New York. The detectives in that city were put to work and captured the knaves almost at the same time that Bud and Kincade were taken.

It required a little time for Mr. Carter to satisfy himself beyond all mistake that the two named were the ones who were engaged in the dangerous pursuit of "shoving" spurious money, and he resolved that when he moved he would have the proof established beyond a shadow of doubt.

He easily drew the most important facts from Bud, and thus it will be seen the recovery of the stolen silverware became secondary to the detection of the dealers in counterfeit money.

The officer was annoyed by the failure of Kincade to appear on the night he agreed, and was fearful lest he suspected something and would keep out of the way. He could have taken him at the time Fred Sheldon was paid his reward, for he knew the showman at that time had a lot of bad money in his possession, though he paid good bills to Fred, who, it will be remembered, placed them in the hands of Squire Jones.

Bud was determined to exchange bad currency for

this, and waylaid Fred for that purpose, but failed, for the reason already given. He, however, gave Fred twenty dollars to change, which it will also be remembered fell into the hands of the detective a few minutes later, and was one of the several links in the chain of evidence that was forged about the unsuspecting youth and his employer.

Then Bud, like many beginners in actual transgression, became careless, and worked off a great deal of the counterfeit money in the village where he was staying, among the lot being the one hundred dollars which he paid the liveryman for wrecking his wagon.

When Fred Sheldon came into the village to claim his reward for securing the estray lion, Cyrus Sutton, as he was known, who was sitting on the hotel porch, became interested in him. He scrutinized him sharply, but avoided asking him any questions. It was natural, however, that he should feel some curiosity, and he learned that what he suspected was true; the boy was the child of Mary Sheldon, who was the widow of George Sheldon, killed some years before on the battle-field.

George Sheldon and James Carter had been comrades from the beginning of the war until the former fell while fighting for his country. The two had "drank from the same canteen," and were as closely bound together as if brothers. Carter held the head of Sheldon when he lay dying, and sent the last message to his wife, who had also been a schoolmate of Carter's.

An aptitude which the latter showed in tracing crime and wrong-doers led him into the detective business, and

he lost sight of the widow of his old friend and their baby boy, until drawn to Tottenville in the pursuit of his profession.

He reproached himself that he did not discover the truth sooner, but when he found that Mrs. Sheldon was absent he could only wait until she returned, and as we have shown, he took the first occasion to call upon her and renew the acquaintance of former years.

But the moment Carter identified the brave little fellow who had earned his reward for capturing the wild beast he made up his mind to do a generous thing for him and his mother; he was determined that if it could possibly be brought about Fred should receive the five hundred dollars reward offered for the recovery of the silver plate stolen from the Misses Perkinpine.

Circumstances already had done a good deal to help him in his laudable purpose, for, as we have shown, Fred had witnessed the robbery, and, in fact, had been brought in contact with both of the guilty parties.

Mr. Carter was afraid to take Fred into his entire confidence, on account of his tender years; and though he was an unusually bright and courageous lad, the detective was reluctant to bring him into any more intimate association with crime than was necessary from the service he intended to do him.

As he was too prudent to trust the constable, Archie Jackson, it will be seen that he worked entirely alone until the night that Mrs. Sheldon returned home.

Then he called upon her and told her his whole plans, for he knew that Fred inherited a good deal of his

bravery from her, and though it was contrary to his rule to make a confidant of any one, he did not hesitate to tell her all.

She was deeply grateful for the kindness he contemplated, though she was not assured that it was for the best to involve Fred as was proposed.

The detective, however, succeeded in overcoming her scruples, and they agreed upon the plan of action.

The boy was encouraged to make his hunt in the wood, for Carter had already learned from Bud Heyland that the plunder was hidden somewhere in it, and he had agreed to assist in bringing it forth, though Bud would not agree to show him precisely where it was, until the time should come for taking it away.

When Fred found the hiding place he was so overjoyed that for awhile he did not know what to do; finally he concluded, as a matter of safety, to remove and hide it somewhere else.

Accordingly he tugged and lifted the heavy pieces out one by one, and then carried them all some distance, placed them on the ground at the foot of a large beech tree and covered them up as best he could with leaves.

This took him until nearly noon, when he ran home to tell his mother what he had done. Within the next hour James Carter knew it and he laughed with satisfaction.

"It was the wisest thing that could have been done."

"Why so?" asked the widow.

"Don't you see he has already earned the reward, and, what is more, he shall have it, too. He has recovered

the plate without the slightest assistance from any one."

"But the thieves have not been caught."

"That is my work; I will attend to that."

"And what shall Fred do?"

"Keep him home to-night, give him a good supper and put him to bed early, and tell him it will be all right in the morning."

Mrs. Sheldon did not feel exactly clear that it was "all right," but the good-hearted Carter had a way of carrying his point, and he would not listen to any argument from her.

So she performed her part of the programme in spirit and letter, and when Fred Sheldon closed his eyes in slumber that Saturday evening it was in the belief that everything would come out as his mother promised, even though he believed that one of the guiltiest of the criminals was the man known as Cyrus Sutton.

Mrs. Sheldon wanted to tell the little fellow the whole story that night, but the detective would not consent until the "case was closed."

When Archie Jackson was called upon late in the afternoon by James Carter and informed how matters stood, he was dumfounded for several minutes. It seemed like doubting his own senses, to believe that the cattle drover was no other than the famous New York detective, but he was convinced at last, and entered with great ardor into the scheme for the capture of the criminals.

Mr. Carter impressed upon the constable the fact that

the offered reward had already been earned by Master Fred Sheldon. Archie was disposed to demur, but finally, with some show of grace, he gave in and said he would be pleased to extend his congratulations to the young gentleman.

A little judicious flattery on the part of the detective convinced Archie that a point had been reached in the proceedings, where his services were indispensable, and that, if the two law breakers were to be captured, it must be through the help of the brave Tottenville constable, who would receive liberal compensation for his assistance.

Accordingly, Archie was stationed near the spot where it was certain Bud Heyland and Jacob Kincade would appear, later in the evening.

At a preconcerted signal, he sprang from his concealment, and the reader has learned that he performed his part in really creditable style.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN ATTEMPTED RESCUE.

NOW SINCE the reader knows how it happened that Archie Jackson and he who had masqueraded under the name of Cyrus Sutton chanced to be at this particular spot in the woods when the thieves would have removed their booty, and also why the silver could not be found by these worthies, it is necessary to return to the place where the arrest was made.

Bud Heyland did not take kindly to the idea of being a prisoner. None knew better than himself the proofs which could be brought against him, and, after the first surprise passed away, his only thought was of how he might escape.

While the valiant Archie stood over him in an attitude of triumph, the detective was holding a short but very concise conversation with the second captive.

"I'll make you smart for this," Bud heard Kincade say. "Things have come to a pretty pass when a man who is invited by a friend to stop on the road a minute in order to look for a whip that was lost while we were hunting for the lion, gets treated in this manner by a couple of drunken fools."

Taking his cue from the speech, Bud added in an injured tone:

"That's a fact. I was on my way to join the show; but thought it might be possible to find the whip, for it belongs to Colonel Bandman, an' he kicked because I left it."

"After the plans we have laid, Heyland, do you think it is well to try such a story on me," Carter asked sternly.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about. Jake has told how we happened to come here."

"He didn't explain why you wanted Fred Sheldon to change a twenty-dollar bill for you, nor how it happened that you had an hundred dollars to pay for the wagon which was smashed."

"I've got nothing to do with any counterfeit money that has been passed, and I defy you to prove it," Kincade cried, energetically.

"Who said anything about counterfeits?" the detective asked, sternly. "It will be well for you to keep your mouth shut, unless you want to get deeper in the mire than you are already. It so chances, however, that I have ample proof of your connection with the robbery, aside from what Bud may have let drop, and, in addition, will show how long you have been engaged in the business of passing worthless money, so there is no need of any further talk. Will you walk to the road, or shall we be forced to carry you?"

This question was asked because Bud had seated himself as if intending to remain for some time; but he sprung to his feet immediately, so thoroughly cowed, that he would have attempted to obey any command,

however unreasonable, in the hope of finding favor in the sight of his captors.

"We've got to do what you say, for awhile, anyhow," Kincade replied, sulkily; "but somebody will suffer because of this outrage."

"I'll take the chances," Carter replied, laughingly. "Step out lively, for I intend to get some sleep to-night."

"Hold on a minute," the fussy little constable cried, as he ran to the side of the detective and whispered:

"I think we should take the silver with us. There may be more of this gang who will come after it when they find we have nabbed these two."

"I fancy it's safe," was the careless reply, "and whether it is or not, we must wait until we see Fred again, for I haven't the slightest idea where he hid it."

"But, you see——"

"Now, don't fret, my friend," the detective interrupted, determined that Fred should take the silver himself to the maiden ladies. "You have conducted the case so admirably thus far that it would be a shame to run the risk of spoiling the job by loitering here where there may be an attempt at a rescue."

This bit of flattery, coupled with the intimation that there might be a fight, caused Archie to remain silent. He was eager to be in town where he could relate his wonderful skill in trapping the thieves, as well as his fear lest there should be a hand-to-hand encounter with desperate men, and these desires caused him to make every effort to land the prisoners in jail.

He even lost sight of the reward, for the time being, through the anxiety to sing his own praises, and in his sternest tones, which were not very dreadful, by the way, he urged Bud forward.

"If you make the slightest show of trying to run away, I'll put a dozen bullets in your body," he said, and then, as he reached for his weapon to further intimidate the prisoner, he discovered, to his chagrin, that, as on a previous occasion, his revolver was at home; but in its place, put there while he labored under great excitement, was the tack-hammer, symbol of his trade as bill-poster.

The two men went toward the road very meekly, evidently concluding that submission was the best policy, and for once Carter made a mistake.

Having worked up the case to such a satisfactory conclusion, and believing these were the only two attachés of the circus in the vicinity, he allowed Archie Jackson to manage matters from this point.

The valiant constable, thinking only of the glory with which he would cover himself as soon as he was at the hotel amid a throng of his acquaintances, simply paid attention to the fact that the prisoners were marching properly in front of him, heeding not the rumble of distant wheels on the road beyond.

Kincade heard them, however, and he whispered softly to Bud:

"There's just a chance that some of our people are coming. I heard Colonel Bandman say he should send Albers and Towsey back to look up some harness that

was left to be repaired, and this is about the time they ought to be here."

"Much good it will do us with that fool of a Jackson ready to shoot, the first move we make," Bud replied petulantly.

"Go on without so much talk," Archie cried fiercely, from the rear. "You can't play any games on me."

"From what I've heard, you know pretty well how a man can shoot in the dark, an' I'll take my chances of gettin' a bullet in the back rather than go to jail for ten years or so. When I give the word, run the best you know how."

Bud promised to obey; but from the tone of his voice it could be told that he had much rather shoot at a person than act as target himself, and Archie ordered the prisoners to quicken their speed.

Carter was several paces in the rear, remaining in the background in order, for the better carrying out of his own plans in regard to Fred, it should appear as if the constable was the commanding officer, and when the party arrived at the edge of the road where Bud had fastened the horse, the rumble of the approaching team could be heard very distinctly.

"Now's our time! Run for your life!" Kincade whispered, staring up the road at the same instant, and as Bud followed at full speed both shouted for help at the utmost strength of their lungs.

It was as if this daring attempt at escape deprived Archie of all power of motion. He lost several valuable seconds staring after his vanishing prisoners in speech-

less surprise, and followed this officer-like proceeding by attempting to shoot the fugitives with the tack-hammer.

Carter, although not anticipating anything of the kind, had his wits about him, and, rushing past the bewildered constable, darted up the road in silence. He was well armed; but did not care to run the risk of killing one of the thieves, more especially since he felt positive of overtaking both in a short time, owing to the fact that the manacles upon their wrists would prevent them from any extraordinary speed.

Neither Bud nor Kincade ceased to call for help, and almost before Carter was well in pursuit a voice from the oncoming team could be heard saying:

"That's some of our crowd. I'm sure nobody but Jake could yell so loud."

"It *is* me!" Kincade shouted. "Hold hard, for there are a couple of officers close behind!"

By the sounds which followed, Carter understood that the new-comers were turning their wagon, preparatory to carrying the arrested parties in the opposite direction, and he cried to the valiant Archie, who as yet had not collected his scattered senses sufficiently to join in the pursuit:

"Bring that team on here, and be quick about it!"

Now, to discharge a weapon would be to imperil the lives of the new actors on the scene, and this was not to be thought of for a moment. Carter strained every muscle to overtake his prisoners before they could clamber into the wagon; but in vain.

Even in the gloom he could see the dark forms of the men as they leaped into the rear of the vehicle, and in another instant the horse was off at a full gallop in the direction from which he had just come.

For the detective to go on afoot would have been folly, and once more he cried for Archie to bring the team, which had been left by the roadside when Kincade and Bud arrived.

The little constable had by this time managed to understand at least a portion of what was going on around him, and, in a very bungling fashion, was trying to unfasten the hitching-rein; but he made such a poor job of it that Carter was forced to return and do the work himself.

"Get in quickly," the detective said, sharply, as he led the horse into the road, and following Archie, the two were soon riding at a mad pace in pursuit, regardless alike of possible vehicles to be met, or the danger of being overturned.

"Why didn't you shoot 'em when you had the chance?" Archie asked, as soon as he realized the startling change in the condition of affairs.

"Because that should be done only when a man is actually in fear of his life, or believes a dangerous prisoner cannot be halted in any other way."

"But that was the only chance of stoppin' them fellers."

"I'll have them before morning," was the quiet reply, as the driver urged the horse to still greater exertions. "Those men have been traveling a long

distance, while our animal is fresh, therefore it's only a question of time; but how does it happen that you didn't shoot? I left the fellows in your charge."

"I was out putting up some bills this afternoon, and had my hammer with me, of course. When we got ready for this trip, I felt on the outside of my hip pocket, and made sure it was my revolver that formed such a bunch."

"Another time I should advise you to be certain which of your many offices you intend to represent," Carter said, quietly. "I'm not positive, however, that we haven't cause to be thankful, for somebody might have been hurt."

"There's no question about it, if I had been armed," was the reply, in a blood-thirsty tone, for Archie was rapidly recovering his alleged courage.

"And I, being in the rear, stood as good a chance of receiving the bullet as did the men."

"You have never seen me shoot," the little constable said, proudly.

"Fortunately, I never did," Carter replied, and then the conversation ceased, as they were at the forks of a road where it was necessary to come to a halt in order to learn in which direction the fugitives had gone.

This was soon ascertained, and as the detective applied the whip vigorously, he said, warningly:

"Now keep your wits about you, for we are where they will try to give us the slip, and it is more than possible Heyland and Kincade may jump out of the wagon, leaving us to follow the team, while they make good their escape."

Archie tried very hard to do as he was commanded; he stared into darkness, able now and then to distinguish the outlines of the vehicle in advance, and at the same time was forced to exert all his strength to prevent being thrown from his seat, so recklessly was Carter driving.

"We'll be upset," he finally said, in a mild tone of protest. "The road seems to be very rough, and there must be considerable danger in going at such a pace."

"No more for us than for them. I'll take a good many chances rather than go back to Tottenville and admit that we allowed two prisoners to escape after we had them ironed."

The little constable had nothing more to say. He also thought it would be awkward to explain to his particular friends how, after such a marvelous piece of detective work, the criminals had got free. This, coupled with the story of his bruised hand, would give the fun-loving inhabitants of the village an opportunity to make his life miserable with pointless jokes and alleged witticisms, therefore he shut his teeth firmly, resolved not to make any further protest even though convinced that his life was actually in danger.

During half an hour the chase continued, and for at least twenty minutes of this time the pursuers were so near the pursued that it would have been impossible for either occupant of the wagon to leap out unnoticed.

Now the foremost horse was beginning to show signs of fatigue, owing to previous travel and the unusual load. Both whip and voice was used to urge him on; but in vain, and Carter said, in a low tone to Archie:

"The chase is nearly ended! Be ready to leap out the instant we stop." Then, drawing his revolver, he cried, "There's no chance of your giving us the slip. Pull up, or I shall fire! If the prisoners are delivered to me at once there will be nothing said regarding the effort to aid them in escaping; but a delay of five minutes will result in imprisonment for the whole party."

Kincade's friends evidently recognized the folly of prolonging the struggle, and, to save themselves from possible penalties of the law, the driver shouted:

"I'll pull up. Look out that you don't run into us!"

It required no great effort to bring both the panting steeds to a stand-still, and in a twinkling Carter was standing at one side of the vehicle with his revolver in hand, while Archie, with a boldness that surprised him afterward, stationed himself directly opposite, holding the tack-hammer as if on the point of shooting the culprits.

Kincade realized that it was best to submit to the inevitable with a good grace, and he descended from the wagon, saying to the little constable as he did so:

"Don't shoot! I'll agree to go peacefully."

"Then see that you behave yourself, or I'll blow the whole top of your head off," Archie replied, in a blood-thirsty tone; but at the same time he took very good care to keep the hammer out of sight.

Bud Heyland resisted even now when those who had tried to aid were ready to give him up.

"I won't go back!" he cried, kicking vigorously as the detective attempted to pull him from the wagon.

"I've done nothing for which I can be arrested, and you shan't take me."

The long chase had exhausted all of Carter's patience, and he was not disposed to spend many seconds in expostulating. Seizing the kicking youth by one foot he dragged him with no gentle force to the ground, and an instant later the men in the wagon drove off, evidently preferring flight to the chances that the detective would keep his promise.

"Bundle them into the carriage, and tie their legs," Carter said to the constable, and in a very short space of time the thieves were lying in the bottom of the vehicle unable to move hand or foot.

Now that there was not the slightest possibility the culprits could escape, Archie kept vigilant watch over them. The least movement on the part of either, as Carter drove the tired horse back to the village, was the signal for him to use his hammer on any portion of their bodies which was most convenient, and this repeated punishment must have caused Bud to remember how often he had ill-treated those who were quite as unable to "strike back" as he now was.

Not until the prisoners were safely lodged in the little building which served as jail did Archie feel perfectly safe, and then all his old pompous manner returned. But for the detective he would have hurried away to tell the news, late in the night though it was, for in his own opinion at least, this night's work had shown him to be not only a true hero, but an able detective.

"It is considerably past midnight," Carter said, as

they left the jail, and we have a great deal to do before this job is finished."

"What do you mean?"

"Are we to leave the silver and money?"

"Of course not; but you said we'd have to wait until we saw Fred."

"Exactly so; but what is to prevent our doing that now? When the property has been delivered to its rightful owners you and I can take our ease; until then we are bound to keep moving."

Archie was disappointed at not being able to establish, without loss of time, his claim to being a great man; but he had no idea of allowing anything to be done in the matter when he was not present, if it could be avoided, and he clambered into the wagon once more.

The two drove directly to the Sheldon home, and Fred was dreaming that burglars were trying to get into the house, when he suddenly became conscious that some one was pounding vigorously on the front door.

Leaping from the bed and looking out of the window he was surprised at seeing the man whom he knew as Cyrus Sutton, and at the same moment he heard his mother ask:

"What is the matter, Mr. Carter?"

"Nothing, except that we want Fred. The case is closed, and to save time we'd better get the property at once. Have you any objection to his going with me?"

"Not the slightest. I will awaken him."

"I'll be down in a minute," Fred cried, as he began to make a hurried toilet, wondering meanwhile why Bud

Heyland's friend should be trusted so implicitly by his mother.

As a matter of course it was necessary for Mrs. Sheldon to explain to her son who Cyrus Sutton really was and Fred was still in a maze of bewilderment when his mother admitted the detective.

"Why didn't you tell me," he cried reproachfully.

"No good could have come of it," the gentleman replied laughingly, "and, besides, I can't see how you failed to discover the secret, either when you ran away after listening behind the rock on the road-side, or when I passed so near while supposed to be hunting for you."

"Did you see me then?"

"Certainly, and but for such slight obstructions as I placed in Bud's way, he might have overtaken you."

"Where is Archie?"

"Out in the wagon waiting for you. Kincade and Bud are in the lock-up where we just left them, and now it is proposed to get the silver in order to deliver it early in the morning."

"Did mother tell you I found it?"

"She did, and I am heartily glad, since now the reward will be yours, and with it you can clear your home from debt."

Fred did not wait to ask any further questions. In a very few moments he was ready for the journey, and, with the promise to "come home as soon as the work was done," he went out to where Archie greeted him in the most effusive manner.

"We have covered ourselves with glory," the little constable cried. "This is a case which will be told throughout the country, and the fact that we arrested the culprits and recovered the property when there was absolutely no clew on which to work, is something unparalleled in the annals of detective history."

Fred was neither prepared to agree to, nor dispute this statement. The only fact which remained distinct in his mind was that the reward would be his, and if there was any glory attached he felt perfectly willing Archie should take it all.

"Get into the wagon, Fred," Carter said impatiently. "It will take us until daylight to get the stuff, and we don't want to shock the good people of Tottenville by doing too much driving after sunrise."

Fred obeyed without delay, and during the ride Archie gave him all the particulars concerning the capture of the thieves, save in regard to his own stupidity which permitted the temporary escape.

Knowing the woods in the vicinity of his home as well as Fred did, it was not difficult for him to go directly to the place where he had hidden the silver, even in the night, and half an hour later the stolen service was in the carriage.

"It is nearly daylight," Carter said, when they were driving in the direction of the village again," and the best thing we can do will be to go to Fred's home, where he and I can keep guard over the treasure until it is a proper time to return it to its owners."

"In that case I may as well go home awhile," Archie

said reflectively. "Doubtless my wife will be wondering what has kept me, and there is no need of three to watch the silver."

"Very well, we shall not leave there until about nine o'clock," and Carter reined in the horse as they were in front of the fussy little constable's house, for him to alight.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SILVERWARE RETURNED.

THE SABBATH morning dawned cool, breezy and delightful, and the maiden twin sisters, Misses Annie and Lizzie Perkinpine, made their preparations for driving to the village church, just as they had been in the habit of doing for many years.

It required a storm of unusual violence to keep them from the Sunday service, which was more edifying to the good souls than any worldly entertainment could have been.

They were not among those whose health permits them to attend secular amusements, but who invariably feel "indisposed" when their spiritual duties are involved.

"I was afraid, sister," said Annie, "that when our silver was stolen, the loss would weigh so heavily upon me that I would not be able to enjoy the church service as much as usual, but I am thankful that it made no difference with me; how was it with *you*?"

"I could not help feeling disturbed for some days," was the reply, "for it *was* a loss indeed, but, when we have so much to be grateful for, how wrong it is to repine ——"

"What's that?" interrupted the other, hastening to

the window as she heard the rattle of carriage wheels; "some one is coming here as sure as I live."

"The folks must have forgot that it is the Sabbath," was the grieved remark of the other.

"But this is something out of the common. Heigho!"

This exclamation was caused by the sight of Cyrus Sutton, as he leaped lightly out of the wagon and tied his horse, while Fred Sheldon seemed to be tugging at something on the floor of the vehicle, which resisted his efforts.

Mr. Sutton, having fastened the horse, went to the help of the youngster, and the next moment the two approached the house bearing a considerable burden.

"My gracious!" exclaimed Aunt Lizzie, throwing up her hands, and ready to sink to the floor in her astonishment; "they have got our silverware."

"You are right," added her sister, "they have the whole six pieces, slop-jar, sugar bowl, cream pitcher—not one of the six missing. They have them *all*; *now* we can go to church and enjoy the sermon more than ever."

The massive service of solid silver quaintly fashioned and carved by the puffy craftsmen of Amsterdam, who wrought and toiled when sturdy old Von Tromp was pounding the British tars off Goodwin Sands, more than two centuries ago, was carried into the house with considerable effort and set on the dining-room table, while for a minute or two the owners could do nothing but clasp and unclasp their hands and utter exclamations of wonder and thankfulness that the invaluable heirlooms had at last come back to them.

The detective and lad looked smilingly at the ladies, hardly less pleased than they.

"Where did you find them?" asked Aunt Lizzie, addressing herself directly to Mr. Carter, as was natural for her to do.

The detective pointed to the boy and said:

"Ask him."

"Why, what can Fred know about it?" inquired the lady, beaming kindly upon the blushing lad.

"He knows everything, for it was not I, but he, who found them."

"Why, Fred, how can that be?"

"I found them in an old tree in the woods," replied the little fellow, blushing to his ears. "This gentleman helped me to bring them here, for I never could have lugged them alone."

"Of course you couldn't, but since you have earned the reward, you shall have it. To-day is the holy Sabbath, and it would be wrong, therefore, to engage in any business, but come around early to-morrow morning and we will be ready."

"And I want to say," said Aunt Annie, pinching the chubby cheek of the happy youngster, "that there isn't any one in the whole world that we would rather give the reward to than you."

"And there is none that it will please me more to see receive it," was the cordial remark of Mr. Carter, who, respecting the scruples of the good ladies, was about to bid them good-morning, when Aunt Lizzie, walking to the window, said:

"I wonder what is keeping Michael."

"I am afraid he will not be here to-day," said the officer.

"Why not?" asked the sisters together in astonishment.

"Well, to tell you the truth, he is in trouble."

"Why, what has Michael done?"

"Nothing himself, but do you remember the tramp who came here last Monday night, and, after eating at your table, stole, or rather helped to steal, your silver service?"

"Of course we remember him."

"Well, that tramp was Michael's son Bud, who had put on false whiskers and disguised himself so that you never suspected who he was. Bud is a bad boy and is now in jail."

"What is the world coming to?" gasped Aunt Lizzie, sinking into a chair with clasped hands, while her sister was no less shocked. In their kindness of heart they would have been glad to lose a large part of the precious silverware could it have been the means of restoring the boy to honesty and innocence.

But that was impossible, and the sisters could only grieve over the depravity of one whom they had trusted.

They asked nothing about the money that was taken with the silver, but Mr. Carter handed more than one-half of the sum to them.

"Bud had spent considerable, but he gave me this; Kincade declared that he hadn't a penny left, but I don't believe him; this will considerably decrease your loss."

At this moment, there was a resounding knock on the door, and in response to the summons to enter, Archie Jackson appeared, very red in the face and puffing hard.

Bowing hastily to the ladies, he said impatiently to the officer:

"It seems to me you're deaf."

"Why so?"

"I've been chasing and yelling after you for half a mile, but you either pretended you didn't hear me or maybe you didn't."

"I assure you, Archie, that I would have stopped on the first call, if I had heard you, for you know how glad I am always to have your company, and how little we could have done without your help."

The detective knew how to mollify the fussy constable, whose face flushed a still brighter red, under the compliments of his employer, as he may be termed.

"I knowed you was coming here," explained Archie, "and so I come along, so as to vouch to these ladies for you."

"You are very kind, but they seem to be satisfied with Master Fred's indorsement, for he has the reputation of being a truthful lad."

"I'm glad to hear it; how far, may I ask," he continued, clearing his throat, "have you progressed in the settlement of the various questions and complications arising from the nefarious transaction on Monday evening last?"

"The plate has been returned to the ladies, as your eyes must have told you; but, since this is the first day

of the week, the reward will not be handed over to Fred until to-morrow morning.

"Accept my congratulations, sir, accept my congratulations," said the constable, stepping ardently toward the boy and effusively extending his hand.

The ladies declined to accept the money which the detective offered, insisting that it belonged to him. He complied with their wishes, and, since it was evident that Archie had hastened over solely to make sure he was not forgotten in the general distribution of wages, the detective handed him one hundred dollars, which was received with delight, since it was far more than the constable had ever earned in such a short time in all his life before.

"Before I leave," said Mr. Carter, addressing the ladies, "I must impress one important truth upon you."

"You mean about the sin of stealing," said Aunt Annie; "Oh, we have thought a good deal about *that*."

The officer smiled in spite of himself, but quickly became serious again.

"You mistake me. I refer to your practice of keeping such valuable plate as loosely as you have been in the habit of doing for so many years. The fact of the robbery will cause it to be generally known that your silver can be had by any one who chooses to enter your house and take it, and you may rest assured, that if you leave it exposed it won't be long before it will vanish again, beyond the reach of all the Fred Sheldons and detectives in the United States."

"Your words are wise," said Aunt Annie, "and I

have made up my mind that we must purchase two or three more locks and put them on the chest."

"I think I know a better plan than *that*," Aunt Lizzie hastened to say.

"What's that?" inquired the visitor.

"We'll get Michael to bring some real heavy stones to the house and place them on the lid of the chest, so as to hold it down."

"Neither of your plans will work," said Mr. Carter solemnly; "you must either place your silver in the bank, where you can get it whenever you wish, or you must buy a burglar-proof safe and lock it up in that every night."

"I have heard of such things," said Aunt Lizzie, "and I think we will procure a safe, for it is more pleasant to know that the silver is in the house than it is to have it in the bank, miles off, where it will be so hard to take and bring it. What do you think, sister?"

"The same as you do."

"Then we will buy the safe."

"And until you do so, the silver must be deposited in the bank; though, as this is Sunday, you will have to keep it in the house until the morrow."

"I shall not feel afraid to do that," was the serene response of sister Lizzie, "because no man, even if he is wicked enough to be a robber, would be so abandoned as to commit the crime on *Sunday*."

The beautiful faith of the good soul was not shocked by any violent results of her trust. Though the silver remained in her house during the rest of that day and

the following night, it was not disturbed, and on the morrow was safely delivered to the bank, where it stayed until the huge safe was set up in the old mansion, in which the precious stuff was deposited, and where at this writing it still remains, undisturbed by any wicked law-breakers.

You may not know it, but it is a fact that there are circuses traveling over the country to-day whose ticket-sellers receive no wages at all, because they rely upon the short change and the bad money which they can work off on their patrons. Not only that, but I know of a case where a man paid twenty dollars monthly for the privilege of selling tickets for a circus.

From this statement, I must except any and all enterprises with which my old friend, P. T. Barnum, has any connection. Nothing could induce him to countenance such dishonesty.

Trained in this pernicious school, Jacob Kincade did not hesitate to launch out more boldly, and finally he formed a partnership with two other knaves, for the purpose of circulating counterfeit money, engaging now and then in the side speculation of burglary, as was the case at Tottenville, where he arrived a few hours in advance of the show itself.

He and his two companions were deserving of no sympathy, and each was sentenced to ten years in the State prison.

The youth of Bud Heyland, his honest repentance and the grief of his father and mother aroused great sympathy for him. It could not be denied that he was

a bad boy, who had started wrong, and was traveling fast along the downward path. In truth, he had already gone so far that it may be said the goal was in sight when he was brought up with such a round turn.

A fact greatly in his favor was apparent to all—he had been used as a cat's paw by others. He was ignorant of counterfeit money, though easily persuaded to engage in the scheme of passing it upon others. True, the proposition to rob the Perkinpine sisters came from him, but in that sad affair also he was put forward as the chief agent, while his partner took good care to keep in the background.

Bud saw the fearful precipice on whose margin he stood. His parents were almost heart-broken, and there could be no doubt of his anxiety to atone, so far as possible, for the evil he had done.

Fortunately, the judge was not only just but merciful. and, anxious to save the youth, he discharged him under a "suspended sentence," as it was called, a most unusual proceeding under the circumstances, but which proved most beneficent, since the lad never gave any evidence of a desire to return to his evil ways.

As for Master Fred Sheldon, I almost feel as though it is unnecessary to tell you anything more about him, for, with such a mother, with such natural inclinations, and with such training, happiness, success and prosperity are as sure to follow as the morning is to succeed the darkness of night.

I tell you, boys, you may feel inclined to slight the old saying that honesty is the best policy, but no truer

words were ever written, and you should carry them graven on your hearts to the last hours of your life.

Fred grew into a strong, sturdy boy, who held the respect and esteem of the neighborhood. The sisters Perkinpine, as well as many others, took a deep interest in him and gave him help in many ways, and often when the boy was embarrassed by receiving it.

The time at last came, when our "Young Hero" bade good-by to his loved mother, and went to the great city of New York to carve his fortune. There he was exposed to manifold more temptations than ever could be the case in his simple country home, but he was encased in the impenetrable armor of truthfulness, honesty, industry and right principles, and from this armor all the darts of the great adversary "rolled off like rustling rain."

Fred is now a man engaged in a prosperous business in the metropolis of our country, married to a loving and helpful wife, who seems to hold the sweetest and tenderest place in his affection, surpassed by that of no one else, but equalled by her who has been his guardian angel from infancy—HIS MOTHER.

THE WALNUT ROD.

BY R. F. COLWELL.

MY FATHER was a physician of good practice in a wealthy quarter of Philadelphia, and we boys, four in number, were encouraged by him to live out of doors as much as possible. We played the national game, rowed, belonged to a well-equipped private gymnasium, and were hale and hearty accordingly; but especially did we prize the spring vacation which was always spent at our grandfather's farm, a beautiful spot in the Juanita valley, shut in by hills and warmed by the sunshine, which always seemed to us to shine especially bright on our annual visit, as if to make up for the cloudy and stormy weather of March.

At the time of which I speak, the anticipations before starting were especially joyous. Harry, Carl and Francis, aged respectively eleven, fourteen and sixteen, had after earnest efforts in their school work been promoted each to the class above his former rank, and were

in consequence proud and happy, though tired. I, Royal by name, a junior in a well-known New England college, working steadily in the course, was not unwilling to spend a week or two in quiet, searching the well-stored library which had the best that three generations of book lovers could buy on its shelves, and before whose cheery open fire we gathered at evening for stories and counsel from older and wiser minds.

We packed our bags, took our rods—for trout fishing was often good, even in early April, in a well-stocked brook that ran along willow-fringed banks in the south pasture—and boarded the train. At the station the hired man met us with a pair of Morgan horses than which I do not remember to have seen better from that day to this, and we were soon at the hall door, shaking hands with grandmother and grandfather, and, to our pleasant surprise, with Aunt Celia, who, unexpectedly to us, was at home. She was a widow, having lost her husband in the Mexican war, and was a teacher of modern languages in a girl's private school in southern New York. She was one of those rare natures that the heart instinctively trusts, and no one of the many grandchildren hesitated about telling Aunt Celia his or her troubles, always confident that something would be done toward making the rough place smooth or gaining the object sought.

We had a cozy tea. The special good things that

only grandmothers seem to remember that a boy likes were found beside our plates, and we did them ample justice. This was Saturday evening. The next morning we occupied the family pew, and raised our young voices in the familiar hymns so clearly and joyously, that I remember to have seen many of the older people looking in our direction, and one old lady remarked as we were going out, "Henry's boys take after him for their good voices." Father had led the village choir for several years before he went away from his home to the medical school.

The next morning we took our rods and went off for a long tramp. We fished some, and between us brought home enough for next morning's breakfast. The next day we climbed the favorite hills and gathered four large bunches of that spring beauty *Epigæa repens*, arbutus, or May flowers, whose pink cups and delicious woody fragrance we entrusted to damp moss, and sent the box with our cards to mother, for we knew how she loved the flowers she had picked from these same hills. Their scent comes back to me now, though it is many years since I have picked one. Carl and Francis were just at the age when feats of daring were a delight to them. Harry was of a naturally timid nature, modest, and lacking sometimes in confidence, and so was often urged on by the other two, when he shrank from attempting anything, by such expressions as "Don't be a cow-

ard, Harry!" "A girl could do that!" which, by such a sensitive spirit, were felt more than blows of the lash would be. When I was by, the boys would not indulge in these trials of strength or endurance, but in my absence I knew they hurt his tender feelings by their taunts, though really they did not intend to. A boy looks for what he calls courage in his playmate, and, if he does not see what apparently corresponds to his own, he thinks him a coward, while the braver of the two may really be the more diffident and shrinking one.

It was Saturday afternoon; we were to leave Monday morning, and I had gone to the post-office to mail a letter to our father, telling him to expect us Monday noon. Behind the barn was a large oak tree from whose trunk a long branch ran horizontally toward the shed roof, though at a considerable distance above it. The boys had been pitching quoits near the tree, and, having finished the game, looked about for some more exciting sport. Francis thought he saw it, so he climbed the tree, crept out on the limb, hung by the arms a moment and then dropped, with something of a jar, to be sure, but safely, on the roof, where he sat with a satisfied look. He called to Carl to follow him. Carl, though unwilling to try it, was still more unwilling to acknowledge any superiority of his older brother in that line, so he, too, climbed up, crept out, and, when he had found what he thought was a good place, and had called out two or

three times, "Fran, shall I strike all right?" dropped and was happy. Then they both called to Harry, "Come on, Hal," but he, overcome by the fear he had felt that they would fall while attempting it, refused to make the trial. When they began to speak about what "a girl could do," grandfather came out of the back door, where he had been a silent spectator of the whole affair, patted Harry on the shoulder, assuring him that he'd more good sense than Carl and Francis together, and bade the climbers come down at once.

Grandfather was a man of few words, and they obeyed. Nothing more was said. I returned soon after. We had tea as usual and adjourned to the library, where a genial fire of hickory logs warmed and lighted the room. Grandmother and grandfather sat in their armchairs on each side of the broad hearth. I occupied an antique chair I had found in the attic, and which I was to carry home for my own room. Carl and Francis sat on old-fashioned crickets, while Aunt Celia had her low willow rocker in front of the fire, and Harry leaned against her, with her arm around his neck.

We remained silent for some moments, when grandfather said quietly, "Celia, hadn't you better tell the boys the story of the walnut rod?" We looked up in swift surprise. The walnut rod spoken of was one that had rested, ever since we could remember, across a pair of broad antlers over the fireplace, with an old sword

and two muskets that had seen service at Bunker Hill and Yorktown. Often had we, in boyish curiosity, asked what it was, and why it was kept there, tied by a piece of faded ribbon to one of the antlers, but had always been put off with "by-and-by," and "when you are older." Now, when we saw a chance to know about it, we chorused, "Oh, yes, Aunt Celia, do tell, please," and she quietly saying, "I suppose they can learn its lesson now," began:

"I was, as you know, the only girl of the family, and also the youngest child, your father being two years older. There were few neighbors when we first came here to live; indeed, our nearest was fully a quarter of a mile away, so we saw few beside our own family. Your uncles, John, William, and Elijah, were several years older, and so were busy helping father in clearing the land and in its care. Accordingly, Henry and I were much together. We studied the same book at our mother's knee, played with the same toys, and were together so much that the older boys sometimes called us 'mother's two girls.' But your father, though tender and gentle in appearance, had a brave heart under his little jacket, and I knew better than they, that he was no coward. They called him so sometimes, thinking, because he seemed fearful about some things they counted trifles, that he really had no courage. I'm afraid boys have forgotten nowadays, that mere daring

is no test of true courage." Here Francis and Carl felt their faces grow hot, but Aunt Celia said no more and went on.

"It was one day in April, very like to-day, that we all went upon the side hill to pick May flowers. Henry was nearly twelve years old—his birthday, as you know, is next month—and I was ten. It had always been a habit, when people went out in the spring for flowers, to cut a stout stick, to be used partly as a walking-stick, and partly as a protection against snakes, which were often seen, but which usually escaped before they could be reached. Old people told of rattlesnakes that used to be seen, but they were very scarce, even then, and none of us had ever seen one.

"We all had sticks, cut from a bunch of hickory saplings that grew beside the path, and your uncle Elijah said, as we were going along, 'I wonder what Henry would do if he heard a rattlesnake; turn pale and faint away, I guess,' at which the others laughed loudly, but Henry said nothing, though I saw his lips quiver at the taunt.

"We found the flowers, thick and beautiful, just as you have this week. We picked all we wished, ate the lunch which mother had put up for us, and were sitting on a large, flat stone, talking of starting for home. I saw a bit of pretty moss under some twigs at the edge of the stone, and stepped down to get it, when suddenly

a peculiar whir-r-r, that we never had heard before, struck our ears. All the boys started up, looking about eagerly. The bushes at my side parted slightly, and the flattened head of a large rattlesnake protruded, and again came that dreadful sound. Then the boys jumped from the rock, each in a different direction, and screamed, rather than cried, 'Jump, Celia, it's a rattlesnake!'

"I could not move. I must have been paralyzed by fear, for, though I was but a child, I could not misunderstand my danger. Of course, what I am telling happened in a few seconds, but I remember hearing the swish that a stick makes when it cuts through the air, and the horrible head, with its forked, vibrating tongue, was severed from the writhing body, and fell at my feet.

"Harry had quietly stepped down by my side, and with his stick—the one you see on the antlers yonder—had saved me from a dreadful death. There he stood, pale and trembling to be sure, but with such a light in his blue eyes, that none of his older brothers dared ever call him coward, or girl, again. We walked quietly home, bringing the body with its horrible horny scales to show to father and mother. I shall never forget how they clasped us in their arms as they listened to the story, and how I wondered, as a child will, if everybody, when they were grown up, cried when they were very glad.

"Nothing was ever said to the older boys. They had

learned what true bravery was, the scorn of self-protection when another needed help, and they have been better for it ever since. Your father has never had the story told to you, thinking that some time it might also teach you the lesson that true courage from its root word, the Latin *cor*, and down through the French *cœur*, is both below and above any outward manifestations, and belongs to the heart.

"The snake must have come out into the sun from his den under the rock, and was not as active as in warmer weather, or the bite would have followed the first alarm. There has never since been seen another in this locality."

We sat in silence for awhile, and then grandfather spoke, laying his hand on Harry's curls: "I seem to see my boy Henry again in his son, Harry. I hope he will grow up into the same brave, though tender manhood of his father, and remember, boys," he said, turning toward Francis and Carl, "that recklessness and a desire to be thought bold and daring are not an index of true courage and often have no connection with it. If the walnut rod teaches you this lesson, its story will be of great value to you."

HOW THE HATCHET WAS BURIED.

BY OCTAVIA CARROLL.

A FEUD, as fierce as that between the Montagues and Capulets, had for several years raged between the boys of Valleytown and the country lads living on the breezy hills just above the small village. Originating in a feeling of jealousy, it waxed hotter and more bitter with every game of ball and every examination at the "Academy" where they were forced to meet the rival factions, tauntingly dubbing each other "Lilies of the Valley" and "Ground Moles," while if a Lily chanced to whip a Mole in a fair fight all the town-bred youths immediately stood on their heads for joy, and if a Mole went above a Lily in class, the entire hill company crowed as loudly as the chanticleers of the barnyard. By general consent two boys had come to be considered the leaders of the respective factions; handsome, quick-witted Roy Hastings of the former, and stronger, bright Carl Duckworth of the latter; while it

was an annoyance to each that their sisters had struck up a "bosom friendship" and stubbornly refused to share in their brothers' feud.

"It is so absurd in Roy," said Helen Hastings, "to want me not to visit Maizie, whom I love so dearly, just because one of her family has beaten him at baseball and shot more pigeons this spring."

"And Helen shall come to tea as often as she likes to put up with our plain fare," declared little Miss Duckworth, "even if Carl does look like a thunder-cloud all supper time and has hardly enough politeness to pass the butter."

So matters stood when, one evening in early June, the commander of the heights' coterie summoned his followers to a meeting in the loft of an old barn on his father's estate, that was only used as a storehouse since a better one had been built.

"Hello, fellows, what is this pow-wow about?" asked agile Mark Tripp, as he sprang up a rickety ladder and popped his head through the square opening in the attic floor.

"Dun'no; some bee, Duckworth, here, has buzzing round in his bonnet," replied lazy Hugh Blossom from the hay, where he reclined. "It takes the captain to have 'happy thoughts,' " while, playfully pulling a refractory lock of hair sticking out from Carl's head, he gaily chanted:

"And the duck with the feather curled over his back,
He leads all the others, with his quack! quack! quack!"

"Good enough! All right, Ducky, proceed with your quacking! Let's know what's up! Are the 'low-ly lil-is of the val-ly' once more on the war path? And to what do they challenge us—a spelling match or a swimming race?"

"To neither. Those very superior posies are about to seek glory in another way. I have learned from a most reliable source that they are now hoarding all their pocket money in order to astonish the natives. In fact, fellers, they intend to fresco Valleytown a decided carmine on the 'Glorious Fourth,' and we have got to make the hills hum to quench 'em."

"What form is their celebration to take?" asked little Peter Wheatly.

"Fireworks, principally. Real stunners! Not just a few Roman candles and sky-rockets, but flower-pots throwing up colored balls that burst into stars, zig-zagging serpents, and all sorts of things, such as have never been seen round here before. Why, our big bonfire and giant crackers will be nowhere."

"Right you are there, Cap," said Hugh. "They will have all the country down on the Green patting them on the back for their public spirit, while we occupy a back seat. It's a pretty bright move for the Lilies, and I don't see how we can prevent it."

"Get up a counter-attraction. Pyro—pyro—what do you call 'em will make a good deal finer show from Round Knob than down yonder in the dale."

"Sure. But where are your pyrotechnics to come from?"

"From the city, of course. See here, I wrote to a firm there as soon as I learned the Lilies' secret, and they sent me a price-list." Young Duckworth produced a very gay red and yellow circular, but the boys only looked at each other in blank amazement. The hillside farmers were nearly all land poor, gaining but a bare subsistence out of the rocky New England soil and seldom had a dime, much less dollars, to squander on mere amusement.

"Guess you think we are Rothschilds or Vanderbilts," snickered small Peter.

"Pennies always burn a hole in my pocket and drop right out," said Mark.

"I might chip in a copper cent and a nickel with a dig in it," drawled Hugh, and there was no one else who could do better.

"Well, I know you are an impecunious lot," continued Carl, "but next week the strawberries will be dead ripe. If you fellows will only be patriotic and pitch in and pick for the cause we can put Roy Hastings and his top-lofty crowd to the blush by getting up a really respectable show with a 'piece' as a topper off. I don't believe the Valleyites ever thought of a 'piece.'"

"What sort of a piece?" asked Bud Perkins.

"Why, a fancy piece of fireworks, of course. Just listen to what Powder & Co. offer!" and Carl read aloud: "Realistic spectacle of Mother Goose, in peaked hat and scarlet cloak, with her gander by her side. The head of George Washington, the Father of his Country, surrounded by thirteen stars. Very fine. Superb figure of Christopher Columbus landing from his Spanish galleon upon the American shore. One of our most magnificent designs."

"There, don't that sound prime? They're expensive, awfully expensive, but we can economize on the rockets and little things to come out strong, in a blaze of glory, at the end. I warrant a Mother Goose or, better yet, a Washington would shut up the Lilies' leaves in a jiffy."

"Or Christopher Columbus—I vote for old Chris," shouted Mark.

"Yes, yes, Chris and his galleon," chorused the others.

"It is the dearest of them all," remarked Carl, somewhat dubiously.

"No matter, 'Chris or nothing,' say we." So it was decided, and before the boys parted they had all agreed, if they could win their parents' consent, to hire out for the berry-picking and to contribute every cent thus earned toward the Fourth of July celebration.

There is no spur like competition, and for the next three weeks the ambitious youths devoted themselves

heart, and soul, and fingers to the cause; but the pickers had their reward, when, the berry harvest over, they found they could send a tolerably satisfactory order to Powder & Co., and when, on the third of July, a great box arrived by express, was unpacked, and its contents secretly, and under the cover of night, stored away in the lower part of Farmer Duckworth's discarded barn, their exuberant delight burst forth in sundry ecstatic somersaults and Indian-like dances.

It may be, however, that their exultation might have been tempered with caution had they been aware of two figures gliding stealthily through the darkness without, and known that the case, bearing the name of the city firm, when it was taken from the train, had not escaped the sharp eyes of Roy Hastings and his chum Ed Spafford.

"How do you suppose they ever raised the money to buy all those fireworks?" asked one shadow of another shadow, as they flitted down the hill.

"I don't know, confound 'em! But I do know their show is better than ours, and something has got to be done!"

"Yes, indeed, and surely, Roy, there must be some way!"

"There always is where there is a will, and—and—*matches!*"

Boom, boom, boom! Old Captain Stone's ancient

cannon announced the advent of another Independence Day shortly after midnight, and Young America was quickly abroad with the Chinese cracker and torpedo.

Helen Hastings disliked the deafening racket of the village and, therefore, early beat a retreat to the hills, determined to enjoy the day in her own fashion with Maizie, who welcomed her with open arms.

"I am so glad you have come, Nell, dear, for I was feeling as blue as your sash, if it is the Fourth of July!"

"Why, darling, what is the matter?"

"Oh, I am so worried because pa is worried. He don't act a bit like his dear, jolly, old self, but goes round with a long face and can neither eat nor sleep. Ma says it is because a mortgage or something is coming due, and the crops have been so bad for several years that he is afraid he may have to sell the farm and move out West. It would just break my heart to leave this place."

"So it would mine. But there, Maizie, it is foolish to be troubled about what may never happen. It is so warm let us find a nice cool spot and finish the book we commenced the other day."

"There is a good current of air through the loft of the old barn. We will go there if you can scramble up the ladder."

This, with some assistance, Helen succeeded in doing,

and the two girls were soon nestling in the sweet, new-mown hay.

"Eleven o'clock," announced Helen, consulting her little chatelaine watch as they finally laid down the entertaining story they had been reading, "and I am both sleepy and thirsty."

"Well, my dear, lie back and take a nap and I will go and make lemonade for us both."

"Really? Oh, that will be delicious!" and throwing herself back on the fragrant mow she closed her eyes as her blithe, hospitable friend skipped off toward the house.

The twittering of the swallows in the eaves and the hum of the insects in the meadows without were curiously soothing, and the fair maid fell into a light doze from which, however, she was rudely awakened by a terrific explosion. She sprang to her feet in alarm to find the floor heaving like the deck of a ship at sea and feel the tumble-down building rocking as though shaken to its very foundation.

"What has happened! Is it an earthquake?" she gasped, rushing to the ladder-way; but she started back in affright at sight of a mass of flame and flying, fiery objects below. "Oh, this is terrible!" Was she, Helen Hastings—her father's pride, her brothers' pet—to meet a violent death here in this lonely spot? Expecting every instant to have the boards give way beneath her, she flew

to the window and, in her desperation, would have leaped out, regardless of a huge pile of stones beneath, had not the voice of Maizie at that moment reached her ear calling: "Don't jump, Helen; don't jump! You will be killed! Wait! courage! I am going for help." Even as she faltered hesitatingly, her strength failed, her senses reeled and she fell fainting to the ground.

Across lots from Round Knob, where they had been preparing for the evening exhibition, came Carl Duckworth, Hugh Blossom and Bud Perkins. They were in high spirits, discussing with animation the anticipated fun, when Bud suddenly stopped short, asking, "Who are those fellows making tracks so fast down the road?"

"Looks like Roy Hastings and Ed Spafford," replied Hugh. "Though what brings them this way on such a day as this puzzles me."

"I hope they haven't got wind of our plans and been up to some mischief," said Carl, uneasily, instinctively quickening his footsteps.

A moment later, as they entered the farm gate, the explosion that had awakened Helen made them also start and gaze at each other in dismay. Then a howl of mingled rage, grief and astonishment burst from the trio as through the open door of the old barn shot a confused medley of rockets, pin-wheels, snakes and grasshoppers, popping and fizzing madly in the garish sunlight; a howl that culminated in a shriek when whirling and

spinning out whizzed the famous "piece," the Landing of Columbus, thrown by the concussion far upon the grass, where it went off in a highly erratic manner, poor Christopher appearing perfectly demoralized as he stood on his head in the brilliant galleon, with his feet waving amid a galaxy of stars.

"All our three weeks' labor and all our money gone up in smoke!" groaned Bud, flinging himself down in an agony of despair.

"And it is Roy Hastings' mean, dastardly work," growled Hugh; while Carl turned pale with wrath and shook his fist in a way that boded no good to his enemy. Indeed, at that instant, he felt that revenge, swift and telling, would be the sweetest thing in life.

Truly, then, it seemed the very irony of fate, when, from amid the wreaths of smoke pouring from the upper loft window, emerged for a brief second a girlish, white-robed figure, with beseeching, outstretched hands, that paused, swayed, then fell back and disappeared, while Maizie rushed toward them crying, "Oh, Carl, Carl! The old barn is on fire, and Helen is in there!"

"What! Roy Hastings' sister?" and Hugh actually laughed aloud.

"Serves the mean rascal right, too, if she was killed, for he would have no one but himself to blame," said Bud Perkins, whose bark was always worse than his bite,

and who was really as kind-hearted a chap as ever lived.

"Oh, you bad, cruel boys!" exclaimed Maizie; "but Carl, I know, will not be so wicked," and she turned imploringly to her brother, in whose mind a fierce struggle was going on. In a flash, he saw his foe bowed and crushed with remorse, a "paying back" far beyond anything he could have dreamed of! Besides, the risk was tremendous, and why should he endanger his life? But the next moment humanity triumphed, and shouting, "We can't stand idle and see a girl perish before our eyes! So here goes," he sped off toward the burning building, stripping off his jacket, as he ran, which he plunged into a barrel of water and then wrapped closely about his head. Thus protected, he bravely dashed through the flames lapping at him with their fiery tongues. His breath came in short, quick pants, he was nearly suffocated, and falling rafters warned him that he had no time to spare. Valiantly, however, he struggled to the already charred ladder and groped his way up it, until, gasping and exhausted, he reached the window with the unconscious girl in his arms, as the fire was eating through the floor at his feet.

To the anxious watchers outside, it appeared an eternity before the lad reached the window and deftly caught the rope they had ready to toss to him. With trembling fingers he knotted this about Helen's waist,

gently let her down into the arms of Bud and Hugh and then prepared to descend himself, when a groan of horror from the onlookers rent the air; there was a quiver, a sudden giving way, a deafening crash and roar. The flooring had at length succumbed to the destroying element and gone down. Mrs. Duckworth sank on her knees sobbing. "Oh, my boy! my boy!" and Maizie hid her face. But, as the smoke cleared away, the groan changed to a joyous shout and all looked up to behold the youth clinging to the casement, which was still upheld by two feeble supports.

Hugh sprang forward. "Carl, drop! Let yourself drop," he called. "We will catch you," and Carl, as a great darkness overwhelmed him, dropped like a dead weight and was borne, a begrimed and senseless burden, to his own little room in the cozy old homestead.

Summer was over ere a mere wraith of sturdy, lively Carl Duckworth was able to creep down stairs to sit on the veranda and gaze listlessly out upon the mountain landscape in its early autumn dress. But, after weary weeks of pain and anxiety, he was on the mend, and there was something of the old merriment in his laugh when he caught sight of a row of urchins, perched on the fence like a motley flock of birds, singing with hearty good will, "See, the Conquering Hero Comes!" and he was surprised to recognize in the welcoming choristers many "Lilies" of Valleytown, as well as his own familiar friends.

It was something of an astonishment, too, to have Roy Hastings hurry forward to offer his hand and say:

"I can't tell you, Duckworth, how glad I am to see you out again and only wish you would give me a good sound kicking;" while surely there were tears in his eyes and a curious break in his voice.

It was a boy's way of begging pardon, but, being a boy, Carl understood, while as he looked into the other's white worn face, so changed since he saw it last, he dimly comprehended that there might be "coals of fire" which burn more sharply even than the blisters and stings that had caused him such days and nights of agony.

So the grasp he gave Roy was warm and cordial as he said, "Well, I'm not equal to much kicking yet, old fellow; but, for one, I am tired of this old feud and think it is time we buried the hatchet."

"Oh, I am so glad!" cried a merry voice in the doorway, and out danced Helen with her hands full of flowers. "You dear, heroic Carl. I have come to thank you, too, though I never, never can, for rescuing me on that dreadful day, and, as some small return, they have let me be the first to tell you of the silver lining hidden behind that cloud of smoke."

"What do you mean?" asked Carl, thoroughly mystified.

"I mean that Christopher Columbus and his com-

bustible companions did a pretty good turn after all. They plowed up the ground under the old barn so well that when the rubbish was cleared away there came to light what promises to be the finest paint mine in the whole country."

"Paint mine!"

"Yes, sir. Non-inflammable, mineral paint that will not only save the farm, but, perhaps, make all our fortunes."

"It's true, Carl, every word true," laughed Maizie, who had stolen softly up. "Papa has had the ore analyzed, and is so happy he beams like a full moon. Judge Hastings, too, has been so kind, advancing funds, getting up a company and preparing to build a kiln. It has been quite the excitement of the summer in Valley-town."

"Well, well! This is glorious news! Hip, hip, hooray!" a feeble cheer that was echoed and re-echoed by the faction on the fence.

"Dear me, haven't you finished your revelations yet?" exclaimed Mark Tripp, suddenly tumbling up the steps. "For if you have the 'Lilies of the Valley' request the captain of the 'Ground Moles' and the young ladies to occupy the piazza chairs and witness a pyrotechnical display postponed from the Fourth of July, but now given in honor of the recovery of our esteemed citizen, Carl Duckworth, and of our Peace Jubilee."

All laughed at Mark's pompous little speech and hastened to take their places. So at last in a shower of golden sparks they buried the hatchet and the feud between Valleytown and Hillside ended forever amid a generous display of fire-works.

HANSCHEN AND THE HARES.

FROM THE GERMAN, BY ELLEN T. SULLIVAN.

LONG ago, in a little house near a forest in Germany many lived a shoemaker and his wife. They were poor but contented and happy; for they were willing to work and they had their snug little house and food enough for themselves and their little Hanschens.

"Oh! if Hanschen would only grow like other boys, I should be the happiest woman in the land," the mother used to say. "He is six years old, yet he can stand on the palm of my hand."

"Well, if he is not so big as some of our neighbors' boys, he is brighter than many of them," the father used to answer. Then the mother felt so glad she would dance around the room with Hans and say, "Yes, he is bright as a child can be and as spry too. When he runs around the room I can hardly catch him."

One day she said to her husband, "I am going to the forest meadow to cut fodder for the goat. The grass

there is so sweet and juicy that, if the goat eats it, we shall have the richest milk for Hanschen. That will make him grow faster. I will take him with me; he can sit in the grass and play with the flowers."

"Very well," said the father; "take care that he does not stray away from you. Give him some clover blossoms to suck. We are too poor to buy candy for him."

Out through the green forest went Hanschen and his mother. The boy was so happy that his mother could hardly hold him, as he laughed and jumped and clapped his hands. He thought the blue sky was playing hide-and-seek with him through the treetops; that the birds were singing a welcome to him, and that the bees, the butterflies, and great dragon-flies were all glad to see him. When they came to the meadow his mother put him down and gave him some clover blossoms. Then she began to cut the grass and soon she was quite a way from Hanschen, who was entirely hidden by the tall grass.

While the mother was working Hanschen sat sucking his sweet clover blossoms. All at once he heard a rustling, and there, beside him were two little hares. He was not at all afraid. He nodded to them and said, "How do you do?" The little hares had never seen a child. They thought he was a hare, dressed up in a coat and having a different kind of face from their own.

They stared at at him a minute and then one said, "Hop! hop!" and sprang over a grass stalk. "Can you do that?" said they to Hanschen. "Yes, indeed!" said he, leaping quickly over a stalk, as he spoke. "Now," said the hares, "we shall have a fine time playing together." And a fine time they did have, leaping and racing until the sun was low in the west, and the little hares began to think of supper and bed.

"Come home with us; our father and mother will be good to you;" they said to Hanschen. So he leaped away with the little hares toward the green bushes where they lived.

Now there was another little hare, who had staid at home with his mother that day. His bright eyes were the first to see the three merry friends leaping toward the bushes. "Oh, mammy! mammy!" he cried: "Just look through the bushes. Did you ever see such a queer-looking hare as that little chap with my brothers?"

"Bring me my spectacles, child," said Mrs. Hare. "It may be the poor thing has been hurt. That terrible hunter is around again. He chased your poor father yesterday. Then that wicked old fox is prowling about, too. It may be that one of them hurt the poor little stranger so that he does not look natural. If so, I'll soon cure him by good nursing."

That was what kind Mrs. Hare said to her little son. He brought her spectacles, which she wiped and put on.

Then she cried out, "Why bless me! this is no hare! This is a human child! He is lost and his parents will be wild with grief for him. My children, I fear you led him astray. Tell just where you found him and we will carry him back there in the morning. It is so late now he must stay with us to-night."

"We thought he was a hare because he can spring and leap as well as we can. We found him in the forest meadow and we have had splendid fun together," said the little hares.

Then good Mrs. Hare gave Hanschen some hares' bread for his supper, and soon after she tucked him snugly in bed with her sons. Before putting him to bed she drew over him, a soft silky hare coat. It fitted him nicely from the two furry ears to the little stubby tail. The three little hares were delighted and said, "He's a hare now, isn't he, mammy?" "Well, dears, he does look just like one of you; but you must all lie still now and go to sleep for we must get up with the sun, to-morrow," said Mrs. Hare.

In the meantime Hanschen's mother had finished cutting the grass, and she looked for Hanschen and called him until it grew quite dark. Then she went home, weeping bitterly, and told her husband that their child was lost. Out ran the father then to look for his boy; but he could not find him. All that night the poor parents wept and moaned, while Hanschen was sleeping peacefully with the little hares.

The Hare family got up at daylight, and all of them put on their Sunday clothes, for Mr. Hare had said to his wife, "I want folks to see that their child has been with good company; so please put on your very best cap and brush all our children's coats until they shine. I'll wear a high collar and my tall silk hat, and you must tie my cravat in a nice bow."

When all were dressed they ate a good breakfast, locked up their green gate and started for the meadow.

They had scarcely reached the edge of the forest, when they heard Hanschen's mother calling, "Hanschen! Hanschen! darling!" "Here I am, mother;" cried he. "I hear him! I hear him! Oh husband! don't you?" said the mother. "I do hear his voice but I can see nothing except a little brown hare."

Hanschen laughed in delight—sprang forward and pulled off his furry coat. How surprised his father and mother were! By this time the Hare family had come up and Mr. Hare took off his hat and bowing very low, he said, "Mr. Man, this is my good wife and these youngsters are my three sons. Their mother and I try to teach them to do right, and they really are pretty good children. Two of them were playing around here yesterday, and invited your son to play with them, not knowing what sorrow and trouble they caused you by leading him astray. They brought him home with them last night. My good wife gave him plenty to eat;

he slept with my sons and you see the fine suit of hare-clothes he has just taken off. I hope you will let him keep it to remember us by. It is a present from all of us. We are only hares but we have done by your child just what we should like you to do by one of our children if you should find one of them astray. And now, my dear sir, we will bid you farewell and go back to our home."

"Not yet! not yet!" cried Hanschen's father and mother. "Tell us, do you have sorrows or troubles? One good turn deserves another. We should be so glad to do something for you."

"Sorrows and troubles are plentiful in our lives," said Mr. Hare. "If you can stop that terrible hunter from chasing us; and if you can manage to trap that wicked Mr. Fox, will make us very happy. And good Mrs. Man, if you will just throw a few cabbage leaves out on the snow for us in the winter, when every green thing is dead or buried; then we shall not have to go to bed hungry."

Hanschen's father and mother gladly promised to do all they could for the good Hare family; then the two happy families went home.

One day soon after Hanschen's visit to the hares, his father got up very early, for he had two pairs of shoes to finish that day. He had scarcely begun his work when a very loud knock was heard at the door. "Who

can it be so early as this?" thought the shoemaker. He opened the door and there stood—Mr. Fox! "Good morning, shoemaker," said he; "I want you to make me a pair of shoes and do it right off, too, or I'll kill every one of your hens to-night. I'm hare hunting, to-day. I know where a whole family of hares live, down near the forest. I mean to bag them all before they leave their house this morning. They run so fast it is hard to catch them when they are out. But, see one of my shoes is torn, so I must have a new pair before I can walk so far."

The shoemaker bowed and invited the fox to come in and sit down. Then he said, "Mr. Fox, a great hunter like you ought to wear high boots; not low shoes like common folks." That pleased Mr. Fox, so he said, "Well, make high boots; but make them of the finest, softest leather, and do not make them tight." The shoemaker took the hardest, heaviest, leather he could find and soon finished the boots. He put a piece of sticky wax into each boot. He said to himself, "Mr. Fox thinks he is very sly but we'll see whether he can catch our friends, the hares, when he puts on these boots."

Mr. Fox proudly drew on his boots but he said: "They seem stiff and tight. I fear I cannot run very fast in them."

"Just wait till you have worn them a little while—new boots generally feel stiff," said the shoemaker.

"Well, I will hurry off now; but I'll soon come back and bring you the hares' skins to pay for the boots," said Mr. Fox.

A little while after the fox had gone the shoemaker's wife jumped up in alarm from her chair. A hare had leaped in through the window behind her. It was one of their friends—the father of the Hare family. "Save me! the hunter is after me," he cried. "Here, quick! jump into bed," said the shoemaker's wife. He did so, and she covered him up, then she dressed Hanschen in the suit that the hares had given him. She had scarcely done so when the hunter came in and said, "Give me the hare that I have been chasing. I saw him leap into your window. I must have him. There he is now, springing on your table."

"There is my little Hanschen," said the shoemaker. "No wonder you think he is a hare, for he can run as fast and leap as well as any hare," "Yes," said Hanschen's mother, and he often goes out to play in this hare-suit—see how nicely it fits him. But, Mr. Hunter, you must not shoot my Hanschen when you are out chasing hares."

"Well," said the hunter, "if that isn't wonderful. But say, good people, how in the world am I to know whether I am chasing Hanschen or a hare?" "Oh, easily enough," said the shoemaker. "You have only to wait a minute and call out, 'Hanschen!' If the little

creature sits up still and straight like a child, don't shoot, for that will be Hanschen." "I will remember and call out," said the hunter.

"Well, then, to pay you for your kindness, "I'll tell you that if you hurry toward the forest, now, you will be able to bag a fox that cannot be far away; for the rogue has on a pair of boots of my making, and he has hard work to move with them by this time, I'll be bound."

"Thank you, Mr. Shoemaker, said the hunter; "I'll soon finish him and bring you his hide to prove it. Only last night he killed three of my hens." The hunter soon caught up with the fox, brought his hide to the shoemaker and went away.

Then Hanschen's father told the hare to go home to his folks and tell them that the old fox would never trouble them again, and when they heard the hunter they were just to sit still and straight on their hind legs. Mr. Hare flew over the ground on his way home. His good news made him light-hearted and swift-footed. Oh, how happy the hares were! To this day hares often sit up like a child.

Hanschen often spent a day with the hares, and learned to run so well, and spring forward so quickly, that all the people said when he grew up, "He is the best man to have for a postman for the villages around." So Hanschen became postman. He never forgot his

friends, the hares, but always carried some cabbage leaves for them when snow and ice covered up or killed the green leaves. 'Tis said the hares used to watch for his coming, and sing this song when they caught sight of him:

“ Our good friend, Hans,
Is a brave young man; hip, hurrah!
He springs as well
As the best hare can; hip, hurrah!
Beneath his coat
Is a good, warm heart; hip, hurrah!
We may be sure
He will take our part; hip, hurrah!
We need not starve
Though the world be white; hip, hurrah!
Our good friend, Hans
Will give us a bite; hip, hurrah!
This is his time
He is drawing near; hip, hurrah!
Off with hats; now
Cheer upon cheer; hip, hip, hurrah!”

THE END.

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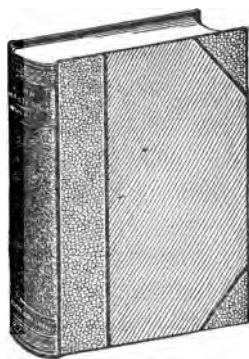
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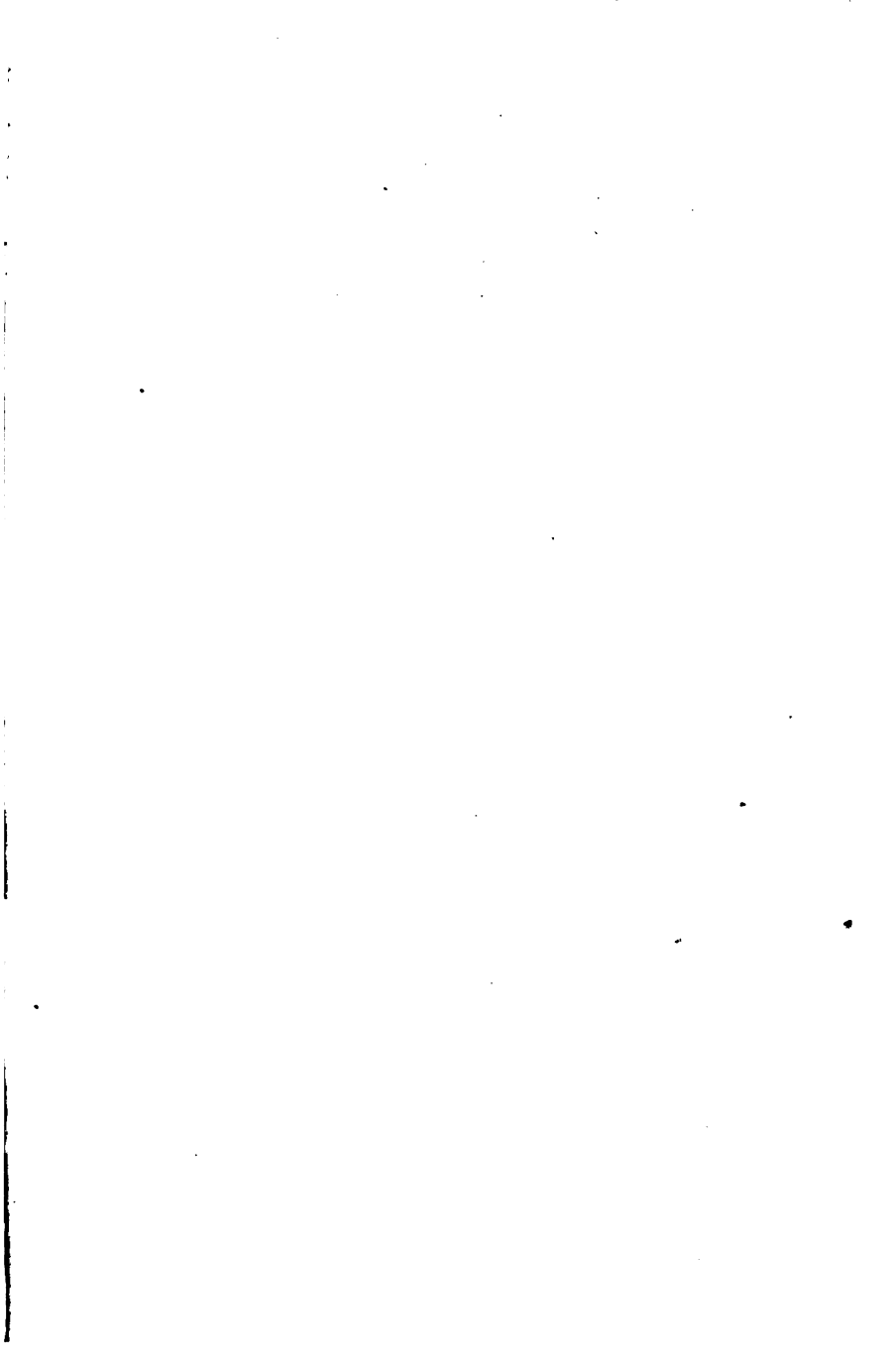
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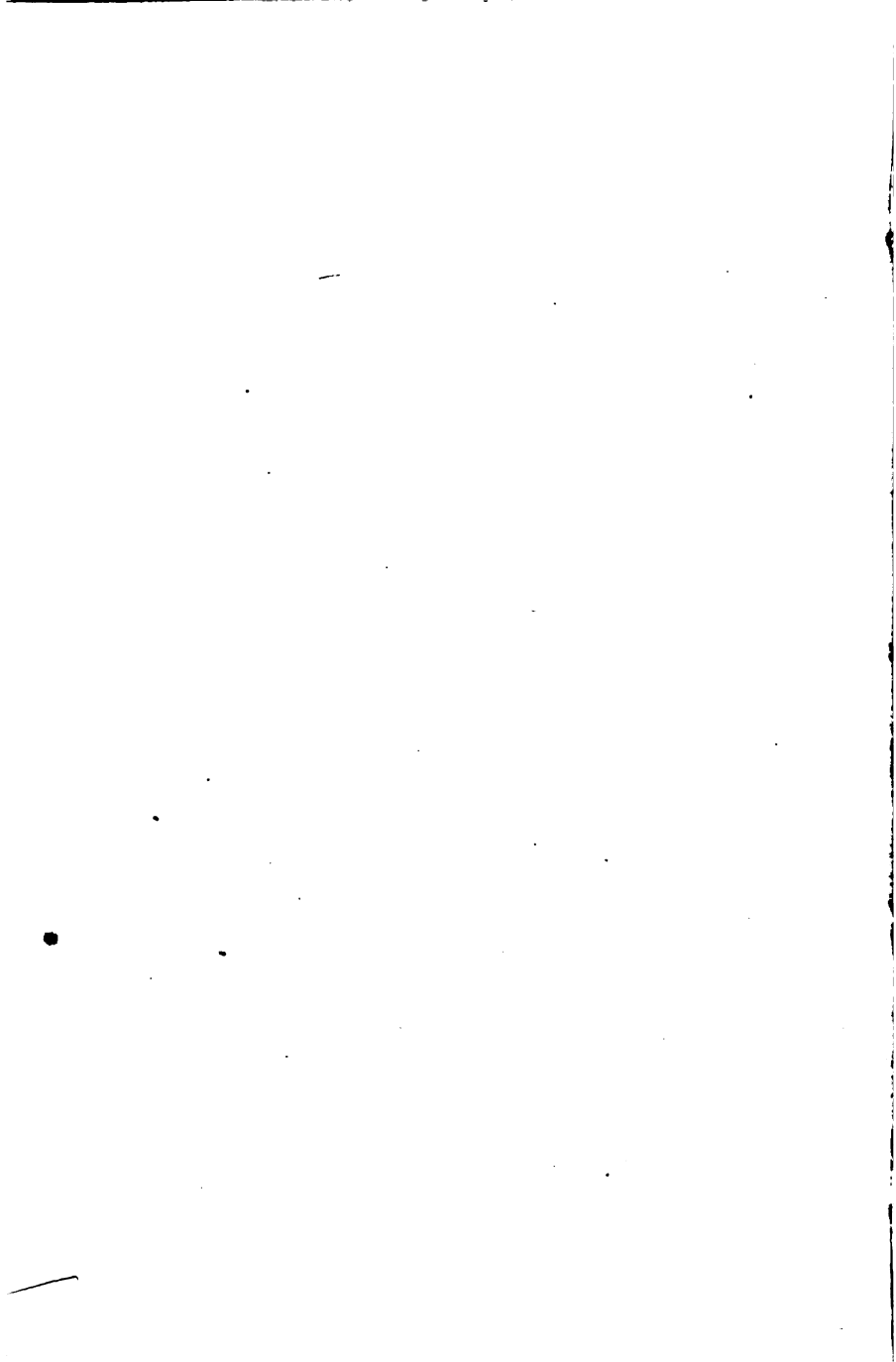
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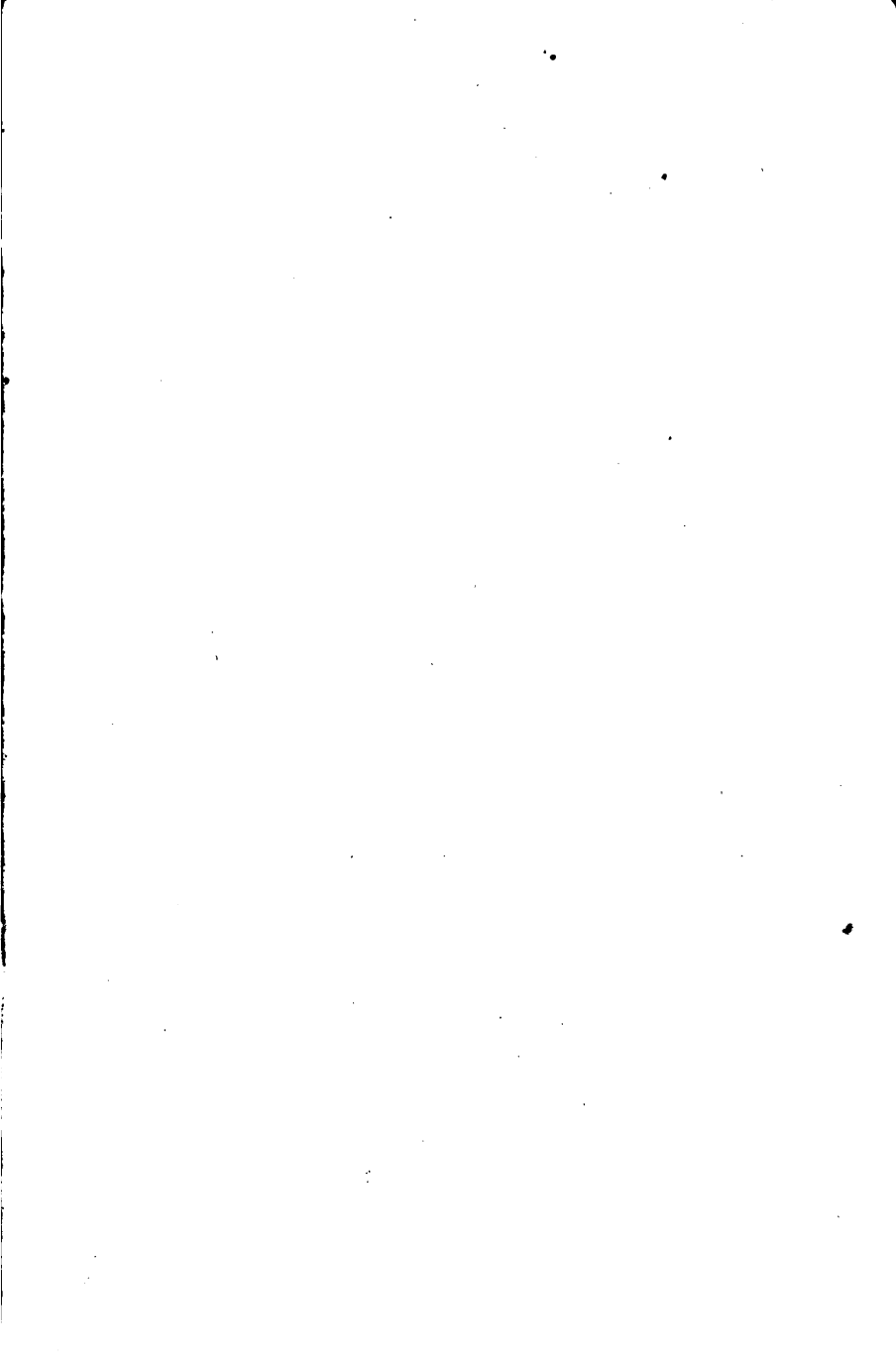
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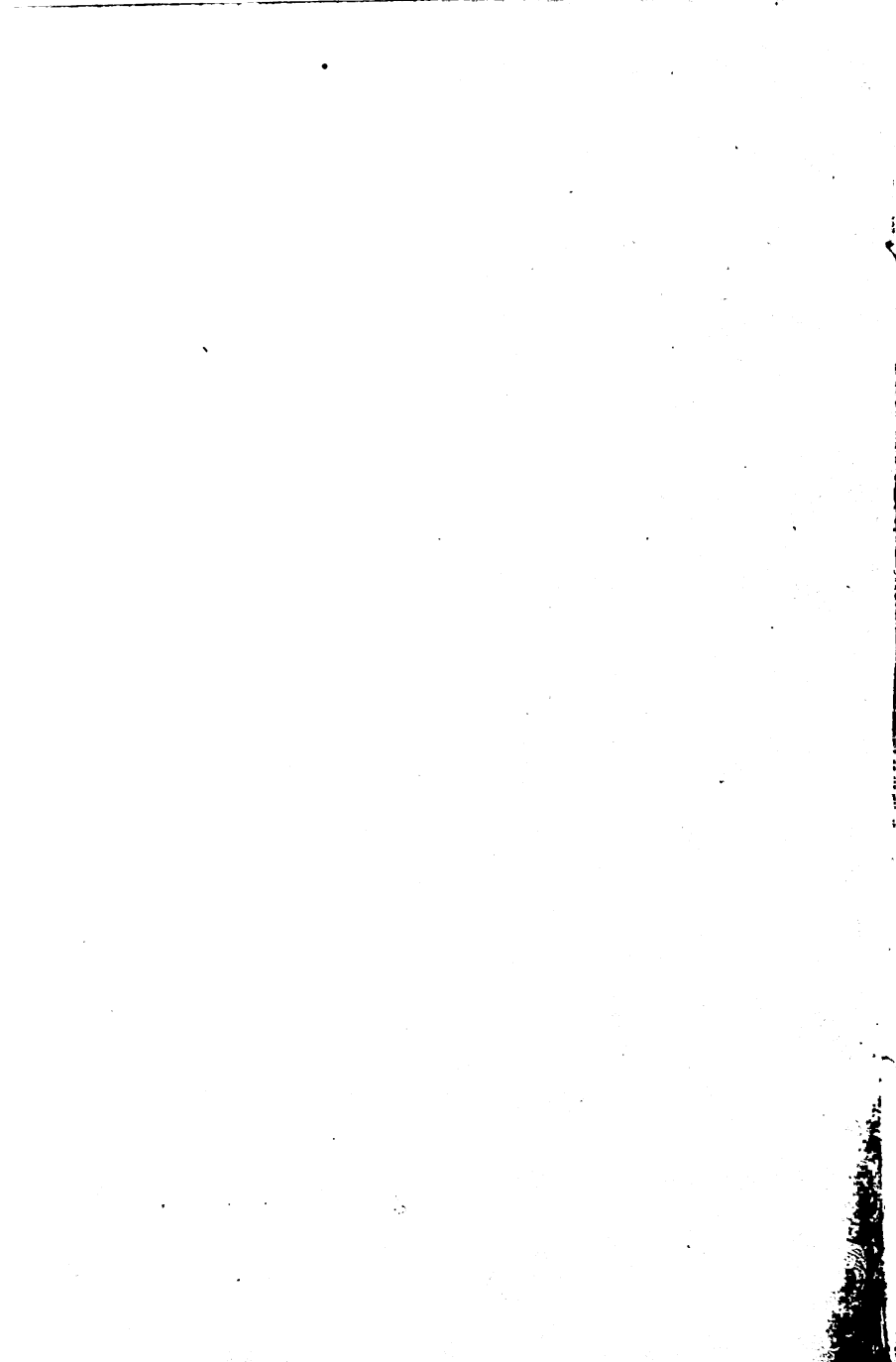
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